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August 10, 1886.

Vol. XIX.

\$2.50
a Year.PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS,
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.Price,
5 Cents.

No. 472.



WITH A FIENDISH EXPRESSION ON HIS FACE, THE VILLAIN BENT FORWARD AND DELIBERATELY CUT THE GIRTH OF JAUNTY JOE'S SADDLE.

OR,
Black Jack's Big Boom.

By JO PIERCE,
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VAGABOND DETECTIVE," "GAMIN BOB,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A WONDERFUL YOUNG HORSEMAN.
"I'd give fifty dollars to have that air boss broke!" cried farmer Perkins, excitedly.
"Give me the money, and I'll make him as tame as a kitten, sir."

The old gentleman wheeled as the quiet voice sounded at his elbow, and then shook his head as he saw that the speaker was a mere boy, and slenderly formed at that. Plainly, he thought

no such stripling would even dare to approach Black Jack, his wild young horse.

"Young man," he replied, "you ought not ter poke fun at yer elders."

"I was in earnest, Mr. Perkins."

"Do you mean to say you would dare to lay hand on that savage critter over in the pasture?"

"Lay hand on him! Why, sir, I agree to tame him so you can safely drive him, if you give me a chance."

"Black Jack would knock your head off."

"I beg your pardon, sir, but Black Jack would find his master in me."

"And who be you, anyhow? Land o' Goshen! I thought boys nowadays didn't care ter ride anything but bicycles, an' spent the balance o' their time in smokin'—what is it ye call 'em?—cigarettes, I b'lieve. You ride Black Jack! Wal, I'll be blowed ef you ain't got grit. Who be ye, anyhow, ef I may be so bold?"

Farmer Perkins was still inclined to think that the slender boy was joking, but the reply came seriously, and in a straightforward way:

"My name is Joseph Baldwin, and I am a horse-tamer by profession. Sometimes I am familiarly referred to as 'Horse-King Joe,' 'Jaunty Joe,' and the like."

The speaker passed a card to the farmer as he spoke.

Job Perkins was one of the richest men in the small Long Island town where he was born and reared, and where he had ever since lived. His farm was a large, handsome, and fertile one, and he made money and enjoyed it, being no miser. His wife and two daughters were among the best dressed of the town's people, and though Job did not care for fine clothes, he did like to have his table supplied bountifully, and did it.

He would have been a model citizen in all ways, and an example for young men to copy from, had it not been for one weakness on his part.

For many years he had driven Old Betsey, his brown mare, to and from the village, and every year she added a fine colt to his worldly possessions. If Mr. Perkins could get the price he asked for the colt, he sold it in the fall. If he could not, he kept it, but not one of the young animals thus retained was ever broken to carriage or saddle.

This was his one weakness; the flaw in his reputation as a business man; and certainly a drag on his means in respect to money.

At the time of our story he had three young horses, ranging in point of age from two to five years, which were almost as wild as the troops of genuine "wild horses" which once roamed over the Texas prairies.

It was generally said that no one had lain hands on one of them since it was six months old, and, certainly, no one dared even bridle them. All summer they wandered in the pasture at will, happy because they did not have to earn their daily food by means of hard labor; in the winter they were stabled and fed, but never handled.

If Mr. Perkins had been younger, or less good-natured and easy, this state of affairs would not have existed, and the young horses would have been properly broken, but that it did exist is a fact.

Of late, however, it had become clear to every one that Black Jack, the oldest of the wild trio, was by far too good a horse to run idle. Good judges declared that he had remarkable speed, and Mr. Perkins saw that if he could have him broken he would sell for a good, round sum.

He decided to have him broken.

It was one thing to arrive at this decision, and quite another to carry it out. Several local horsemen had tried their hand at it. Only one had gotten within reach of Black Jack, and that one had been in the hospital ever since.

Black Jack had broken three of his would-be tamer's ribs, just to show that he was not cold or unsociable.

And this was the horse at which Mr. Perkins and his neighbor, Ezra Randall, had been gazing, as the horse was playing in the pasture, when Jaunty Joe Baldwin appeared on the scene.

The card which he handed to Mr. Perkins read all right—"Joseph Baldwin, Professional Horse-breaker and Trainer," but the farmer still looked at him doubtfully.

"Do you ree'ly break hosses?" he asked.

"Certainly I do—break them and train them."

"Why, you're as slender as a 'skeeter! Break a horse indeed!" cried the owner of Black Jack in some contempt.

"Please feel of my arm, sir."

Perkins obeyed.

"Land o' Goshen!" he exclaimed, "ain't your muscle an' shoulder somehow 'changed places? You've got an arm like a young blacksmith!"

"Which shows that it is not always safe to judge by appearances, Mr. Perkins. I am slightly-built, but I am stronger than the average of boys of my age. Again, I am older than I look. Probably you take me to be about sixteen. I am two years older. Now, as to your horse. I meant business when I said I would break him."

"My boy, I see you did, but you don't know Black Jack. He's speerited, strong, wild and vicious. Only three weeks ago he broke three of Sam Anson's ribs."

"So I've heard, and it was because Black Jack has such a bad reputation that I came here."

"To break him?"

"Yes, break him to ride and drive."

"And you ree'ly think you can do it?"

"Certainly I can!"

"I dassen't have you try. My boy—it's too dangerous."

Mr. Perkins shook his head gravely, anxious to save the boy breaker from harm, and sincere in the belief that only trouble could come from the attempt; but Jaunty Joe went on in confident tones to demonstrate that he could do just what he said.

He had letters from various parties to show that he had done all he claimed. Some of the letters intimated that the boy tamer "magnetized" his horses, but Joe himself gave no explanation of his methods. It was enough that he did it.

Besides this, he had often ridden horses in races at regular courses, and was well known as a jockey. In fact it was his riding that had gained for him his *sobriquet* of "Jaunty Joe"—for jaunty he was in dress and demeanor.

What he did not know about racing matters connected with Long Island was not generally known. The ins and outs of race-courses; the men who run them; horses, their records, peculiarities and pedigree—all these things the boy knew well; and yet he mentioned them quietly and modestly.

He was a modest young fellow, jockey or not, and seemed to have had the rearing of a gentleman, while his keen eyes and intelligent ways surprised and delighted Mr. Perkins.

"I'm a fool ef I don't b'lieve you can beat all them overgrown tamers," he finally said, "an' you shall have a try at Black Jack, anyhow. I've been expecting a chap down from Brooklyn; a reg'lar sportin' man, who said he would bring a tamer, but he ain't come. First come, first served. You can hev the job ef you really want it."

"I certainly do," Joe replied.

"It's a bargain, then."

"Well, I'll go down to the village and—"

"No, you won't. I like ter hev young people about me, an' as them letters an' your looks satisfy me you are an honest lad, you shall go right ter the house with me."

And the farmer then took Jaunty Joe to his house and introduced him to his wife and daughters—the latter being twin girls of seventeen years.

Half an hour later Mr. Perkins and Joe Baldwin went out of the house, and as they reached the door up drove a carriage which contained two men besides the driver.

"Land o' Goshen!" exclaimed the farmer, "here's that Brooklyn chap I tole ye about, with his hoss-tamer. I guess he'll be right put out when he knows he's too late."

The men had sprung from the carriage.

Jasper Banker, to whom Perkins had referred as a "regular sporting-man," was about thirty years of age, and in a certain way good-looking. He had a fine form and stood nearly six feet in his boots, and had a broad, round face of full color. His hair was a very light brown, with a tendency to a pale red color, and a small red mustache covered his lip. His dress was flashy and a huge "charm" dangled from his massive gold watch-chain.

He looked the sporting man to life, and it would have taken no great effort of one's credulity to believe him a gambler and sharper in general.

His companion was a little, dark-faced man, who had the appearance of being a foreigner.

Banker swooped down upon the farmer, and shook his hand in the most friendly way possible.

"How are you, Mr. Perkins? But I need not ask; you look as rugged as an oak. Nothing like country air, is there? And if one's heart don't expand and his soul grow bigger on such a farm as yours, it would be a wonder. You see I've turned up again, as I said I would, and I've

brought a man with me that can make that horse of yours bend the humble knee in short order, without severe measures. Mr. Perkins, Professor Jean Lacour, late of the Royal Government Equine Training and Equestrian Academy, of Paris; instructor to the French president and his friends, and formerly attached to the retinue of Napoleon III. He's the boy that can subdue Black Jack, and we'll have the horse on the track in August, sure as shooting."

The sporting man rattled on at race-horse speed, while meek Mr. Perkins stood vainly trying to edge in a word. Time and again he opened his lips, but Banker went on like perpetual motion.

The farmer was for the time eclipsed, but his hard common sense stood by him; he was not the man to be easily put down.

When Banker gave him a chance, he spoke.

"Land o' Goshen! be you run by steam?" he asked.

"No, but that's what'll be the matter with Black Jack when he goes on the track. He'll beat them all. Just let Lacour break him, and I'll buy the brute at a fair figure."

"Your chances would 'a' be'n a good bit better if you had happened 'long yisterday."

"How so?"

"Because I engaged another hoss-tamer ter-day, an' ef he succeeds in calmin' Black Jack down, mebbe I'll keep the critter myself."

"Engaged another man! Whom?"

"This young man."

The farmer pointed to Jaunty Joe, but Banker's disappointed expression vanished somewhat.

"You're joking, Mr. Perkins."

"No, I ain't."

"Do you mean that this youngster is going to try to break Black Jack?"

"That's it, exactly."

"Why, the kid will get his neck broken."

"Pardon me, Mr. Banker," said Joe, quietly, "but if your memory was as good as mine, you might not have so poor an opinion of me. Have you forgotten who rode Ebony Prince for the Dutchess Cup?"

Banker started back.

"Jaunty Joe, by the fiends!" he exclaimed.

"Exactly."

"And you're the chap who is going to tackle Black Jack, are you?"

"I'm the 'chap'."

A half-subdued oath fell from the sporting man's lips, and he looked at the boy horse-tamer with an evil light in his eyes.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN ON THE LADDER.

JAUNTY JOE knew that Jasper Banker had suddenly become his enemy. He knew the man of old. Possessing a knowledge of horses only medium, but aspiring to be considered great in such matters, he was a constant frequenter of race-courses and an invariable bettor.

He made some money out of it, but though he could talk all day about the good and bad points of various horses, he never bet heavily on his own judgment. If there was a "ring" he "stood in" with the ring, and, when a "crooked" race was run, or trotted, bet all he could raise on the horse which his fellow-gamblers had arranged should win.

It was a contemptible life to lead, but it just suited Banker, and among a certain class he cut quite a figure.

The boy jockey plainly saw that the gambler had determined to possess Black Jack, and that the he was very angry because there was a prospect of losing him—and all through a boy!

"Haden't you better confine your operations to your legitimate business?" he growled.

"My regular business is horse-breaking; riding races is a side-issue," Joe coolly replied.

"And you propose to break Black Jack?"

"Yes."

Banker wheeled upon the farmer.

"Perkins, I have the first claim here," he said, excitedly.

"Land o' Goshen! I didn't think that anybody had a claim," and Mr. Perkins spoke quietly and decidedly.

"Didn't we agree that I should furnish a man to break the horse?"

"No. You said you could bring a man down who could make Black Jack as peaceable as a kitten, an' I said that ef there was a man up your way who wanted his head knocked off, there was lots o' room in our cemetery. That's all the bargain there was to it."

Banker knew this was true.

He believed that the horse, if tamed and pro-

perly triained, could trot well down in the "twenties," if not better, and he had formed the scheme of buying the animal off-hand in his wild state. Then Professor Lacour could "tame" him, and he—Banker—would have a horse on which he could make thousands of dollars.

Now, in the way of this plan, stood this villainous young jockey. But for him, all would be plain sailing.

Banker was not inclined to give it up, and he made a stout argument with the farmer. Professor Lacour was the best horse-tamer in the United States, he asserted, and as he had talked with Perkins before Joe did, his man ought to have the job.

"My motto is, fu'st come, fu'st sarved," said Mr. Perkins, looking benevolently over his spectacles. "The young chap came here ahead o' you an' wanted the job, an' I tol' him he could hev it. I ain't inclined to break my word."

Jasper Banker was an angry man, but he was also sharp and tricky. He held that nothing was ever lost until it was won by somebody else, and he did not yet give up hope of possessing Black Jack.

Clearly, however, the farmer could not be moved, and to show any further temper might be to lay up wrath to come, and show his hand in any trick he might form to get the better of Jaunty Joe. Accordingly, he made a show of giving the matter up with a good grace, but said that he should watch the progress of affairs, and, if Joe failed, again ask leave for Professor Lacour to have a chance.

Perkins readily agreed to this, and the visitor returned to the village in their carriage. Banker bade Joe good-day pleasantly enough, but the boy caught his last glance and knew that it implied a menace.

The turf-gambler hated him for being the cause of upsetting his fine plans.

"I don't jest like that feller," said the farmer, slowly, as he looked after the retreating carriage.

"Nor I," Joe frankly admitted.

"How's he classed among the big-bugs?"

"He's not in their class, Mr. Perkins. Banker cuts quite a figure at racing-parks, but my advice is, have as little to do with him as you can."

"By gosh! I b'lieve you've struck the keynote. Ef Mr. Banker will pay a big enough pile fur Black Jack, cash, an' in good money, he can hev him; but I don't want him nur his French boss-trainer hangin' round. W'ot was all that cheap talk he gin me about the Royal French Napoleon Horse School, or whatever he called it? That was all moonshine; I ain't so darned green as ter swaller all the weak lemonade at a county fair. Not much!"

Mr. Perkins was somewhat vexed, but half an hour with a good supper restored his usual serene temper, and he ceased to mention the turf-gambler.

Joe could find no fault with his treatment during the evening. Mr. and Mrs. Perkins were plain people who did not try to put on any style, and they talked pleasantly and sociably. Lillian and Laura, the girls, were rather diffident, but they were pretty, and seemed to take an interest in the modest young horse-tamer.

He retired early, and soon fell asleep.

After some hours he had a dream in which he thought he was riding Black Jack to victory, but when a few feet from the wire he was thrown violently from the saddle.

This naturally awoke him, but he lay quietly in his former position and smiled at his dream. As he did so, a peculiar noise attracted his attention. It seemed like the rubbing of something against the house, but his first idea that it was the branch of a tree was dissipated when he remembered that there was no tree near enough to the house to touch it.

He glanced toward the window.

The night was dark, but, of course, there was a degree of light at the window, and as he looked he saw an object darker than the night rise slowly above the lower part.

It was the head of a man.

The truth at once flashed upon Joe: some one had ascended by means of a ladder. Who was it, and what was wanted? He knew at once that it could not be Mr. Perkins; he would not make a visit to the room in such a way; and there was only one other explanation.

Some one intended to break into the house, to commit robbery or some other crime.

The boy's mind flashed back to Jasper Banker. He did not know that Banker was a house-breaker by calling, but did believe him capable of doing almost anything to score a point. Was

it not possible that the turf-gambler had determined to head him off in the Black Jack matter by other than honorable means?

The boy slipped out of bed. He heard the unknown try the window, but it was fastened and resisted his efforts. Then followed sounds and motions, from which Joe knew that a piece was being cut from the glass.

He coolly slipped on some of his outer clothes. There was no longer a doubt as to the character of the unknown, and he intended to give him a warm welcome. As he had never been guilty of carrying a revolver, he had to look for some other weapon.

Nothing better than an old-fashioned cricket, or stool, presenting itself to his memory, he found this, and then went close to the window, taking care not to be seen by the unknown.

The latter was working steadily, but with the care and skill of a practical house-breaker. Joe now had an indistinct view of his face, and saw that he was a heavily bearded man, and neither Banker nor the French horse-tamer.

In a short time he had removed a square of glass, doing his work with remarkable ease, and Joe knew it was time to make himself heard.

Poorly armed as he was, he would have allowed the man to enter the house, hoping to capture him, but it would be better not to alarm the household.

A big hand slid through the hole in the glass, moved upward and turned the catch. Then the lower sash was slowly—very slowly raised. Scarcely a sound betrayed the unknown's movements.

It was time for Jaunty Joe to interfere, and he did so in a cool, deliberate voice:

"Excuse me, captain, but you'll find the front door on the ground floor!"

And then he stepped boldly into view.

The house-breaker uttered an oath, and a more astonished man it would have been hard to find. He had investigated before beginning actual work, and felt sure that he had a clear field, and the manner in which this cool voice stole in on his peace of mind was discouraging.

All idea of entering the room vanished, and he made a movement to retreat down the ladder. As he did so Joe aimed a blow at him with the "cricket," and though the burglar avoided it, he lost his balance and fell headlong from the ladder.

There was a momentary pause, and then he struck the ground heavily.

For the first time thoughts of capturing the man entered the boy jockey's mind, and he dropped the stool and sprung out on the ladder, hoping the house-breaker had been stunned. He had, however, gone only a few steps, when the man leaped to his feet and began an unceremonious retreat.

This was not as Jaunty Joe would have had it, but his blood rose up, and he determined not to give up the idea of capture. He believed the fellow was a tool of Jasper Banker, and he wanted to prove it and show the turf-gambler up in his true light.

Accordingly, he started after the runaway at full speed.

As this order of things took him away from the house, he would not disturb the family anyway, and he could have all the "fun" with the burglar that was possible. He did not give a thought to the danger he incurred in molesting a person not only stronger than himself, but, very likely, ready to use his revolver without any regard to life.

Really, he was running great risk.

The unknown directed his course in a north-westerly direction and sped away like a deer.

Joe followed, with quick, long steps.

For a few yards there was no perceptible change in their relative positions, but Joe had the advantage of youth and began to gain perceptibly. Moreover, the chances were that he could hold his pace much longer than the man.

The latter looked over his shoulder and saw how the race was going, and he muttered an oath. He was a man who had done all kinds of desperate deeds in his day, and he had no more regard for his pursuer than that he did not want to get into trouble by killing him.

"Curse the little villain!" he muttered, "he hangs on like a bloodhound. Does he know what he's about? He don't want to give me too hard a pull, or I'll snuff his candle forever. Hang it! I hate to use the barker."

He had drawn a revolver, and was nervously handling it as he ran.

"I s'pose I might stop and hammer him senseless, but it would be just my blamed luck to have him recognize me at some future time, and give me another term in Sing Sing."

At the further side of Mr. Perkins's farm was a small lake, which was a great local resort in the summer season, and where picnics were often held. Upon the south side a boat-house had been erected, and the fugitive knew enough about the vicinity to be aware that it was never locked.

As he had unconsciously directed his steps toward this building, an idea occurred to him when he saw it suddenly loom up ahead of him.

He would run in there, and if the pursuer persisted in following him, dispose of him effectually.

The house-breaker did not wish to commit murder if he could help it, but in some way or other the boy must be kept from doing harm.

It was a hard job to reach the boat-house, for Jaunty Joe pressed closely; but after a run which nearly winded him, the panting fugitive dashed through the door a few yards in advance of Horse-King Joe.

Joe slackened his pace somewhat then.

He was brave, but not reckless, and it occurred to him that it was dangerous to follow his man into that dark building. But what was to be done? Was he to give up all chance of solving the mystery, and let the would-be burglar escape?

One moment he hesitated, and then all his nature protested against abandoning the attempt at that point.

"I'll risk it, if it takes a hoof!" he muttered; and then, increasing his speed, he dashed through the door as though running a race.

CHAPTER III.

WILD EVENTS IN THE DARK.

THE burglar was waiting in the intense darkness to get hold of the boy, and as Joe dashed in he made a plunge forward, his hands outstretched.

Just as he did so, Joe struck his toe against some obstacle and fell, and the burglar lost his balance and tripped over him. Both went down heavily, the boy at the bottom. He realized the necessity of prompt action, however, and, with a quick movement, tried to worm away.

To a certain extent he succeeded, but before he could get entirely out of reach the burglar's strong hand closed around his ankle.

Jaunty Joe had no weapon, but the instinct of self-preservation suggested an extemporaneous one, and as his enemy drew himself up, the boy sent out his other foot straight toward the burglar's face.

His aim was good, and over went the man without ceremony.

By this time Joe had discovered that it would be decidedly rash to fight a person not only stronger than himself, but undoubtedly a ferocious ruffian. The fellow was swearing loudly, and with his oaths he mixed a threat to "wring" the boy's neck. Plainly he was not a safe companion, and the sooner he was left behind, the better.

Jaunty Joe started for the door, but ran against an invisible boat which was turned upside down, and before he could get away the burglar again had his hands upon him.

"You infernal young hound," he hissed. "I'll make short work of you. I'll learn ye not to chase me around. I'll chuck ye in the pond, curse you!"

And he laid hold of the lad even more tightly, and began to drag him away.

Luckily Joe's jockey's courage held good, and as he was no child in point of strength, he prepared to make a stout fight for liberty and victory.

"Takes two to make a bargain!" he retorted defiantly. "Let go of me, or you'll get hurt."

"Not by you, you baboon!"

"Think so? Try that, then."

Joe had got his right hand where he wanted it, and he gave the ruffian a sharp blow. The latter swore again, but he thought he could settle the whole matter by throwing his plucky young enemy in the lake, and he continued to drag him across the floor.

The young Jockey struggled in vain, and he saw that he must adopt another course.

Before the burglar realized the danger, a strong leg was wrapped around his own, and down he went once more, Joe falling upon him.

If the man had been mad before, he was raving now. If Joe had been a man he would have been content to win, after due fighting, but to be thus worried by a mere boy was too much. Shouting several indistinct words, he drew his revolver, determined to end all with one shot. But as he did so a mental picture of Sing Sing once more floated before him.

No; he must not take a human life.

There was still one way left, and he turned

the revolver and brought the butt down on Joe's head.

It was a cowardly blow—a murderous blow. In the darkness Joe had not been able to guard against it, and it fell with force which almost stunned him. It flashed upon him that another like it would leave him at the ruffian's mercy, and with the energy of desperation he grasped the huge wrist and struggled to get possession of the revolver.

Over and over they whirled, continuing the fight in the dark, and the burglar could not get a chance to strike again.

Joe, however, became aware that he could not long continue his efforts. The fight was too much for his strength, and the blow he had received made his head seem to whirl like a top. Clearly, his only hope was to escape the ruffian's hold.

Collecting all his energy, he made an effort so great and resistless, that he broke the burglar's hold, and then started away. But as he tried to step in his feet, his head whirled still more and he fell.

Real alarm seized him now. He could not stand, and he thought he was going to lose consciousness.

He put out his hand mechanically, and it touched the overturned boat. This rested on timbers which raised it two feet above the floor, leaving a space inside, and obeying a sudden impulse, he crawled under.

Once there he had sufficient presence of mind to lay perfectly still, hoping the burglar would be at fault.

The latter had regained his feet and was swearing in a low tone, but he soon became silent. There was a pause, and then he spoke aloud:

"Where be ye, you young whelp? I know mighty well you ain't left the place, and I'll have you out of your hole if I hunt all night for ye."

Joe did not stir a muscle. As long as he lay perfectly still, his head did not whirl, and he could locate the ruffian by his movements.

Suddenly, however, there was something more. Joe's face was turned toward the middle of the boat-house, and he saw the place lighted up without any warning. A lantern threw the burglar into plain view, and a few feet from him stood another man holding the tell-tale light.

A startled exclamation fell from the ruffian's lips, and he wheeled and made an attempt to dash from the place.

Two steps he took, passing for a moment out of Joe's view, and then he reappeared as though hurled back by a strong arm, and fell sprawling on the floor.

Another moment and a third man appeared, coming from the direction of the entrance, and stood looking at the burglar with a face expressive of a degree of fury and hatred that startled the watching boy.

The burglar saw himself in a position of danger—there were not only two, but four men visible around him—and once more he drew the revolver he had once put away.

He did not draw back the hammer.

Suddenly he found himself looking into the muzzle of another revolver held by the man who had hurled him to the floor, and the latter hissed in a terrible voice:

"Keep your hand down! Make a move to raise that revolver, and I'll blow your brains out!"

The burglar obeyed. Half-sitting, half-reclining on the floor, he gazed at his threatener with a surprised, startled look on his face. He was thoroughly cowed for the time.

Jaunty Joe watched in wonder. His own condition began to improve already, and he was capable of thinking clearly, but the state of affairs puzzled him.

Who were these men who had so suddenly appeared?

They did not look like the residents of the town, nor would they have been at the boat-house at that late hour. These men, with their dark faces and rude dresses—who and what were they?

"Gypsies!" thought the boy, and there was every reason to believe he was right.

This explained how they happened to be at the boat-house at that hour; they had unceremoniously taken possession of it for the night, and the burglar had aroused the wrong parties.

Four dark-faced men were visible, and they had the burglar's escape effectually cut off, while on the other hand the revolver bore unerringly on his head.

Joe became aware that something more than an ordinary quarrel was in progress. The bur-

glar and his chief adversary looked at each other in a strange way; the former's frightened expression still on his face, and the latter looking as though he longed to spring upon the fallen man.

"You know me, I see," he added, after a short pause.

"I—I think— No, I don't," stammered the burglar.

"John Kane, you lie!" the Gypsy thundered. The burglar shrunk further back. He had heard his real name pronounced, but would not—dared not—admit the fact.

"I never saw you before," he persisted.

"Coward, as well as villain!"

"My name is Adgarth, not Kane."

"Since when?"

"It was always that."

"Fool! do you think to deceive King Ryer? I never forget a face, and yours is branded on my mind—you scoundrel."

Full of concentrated hatred was the Gypsy's voice, but his outward calmness was surprising.

"I never injured you, Ryer," whined the burglar, suddenly giving up the battle.

"You dog! you helped him to do the foulest wrong a man could do. Whatever he planned, you cheerfully aided."

"I was afraid of him; I dared not refuse."

"Nonsense!"

"It's true."

"You were his ready tool, and I know it. You need not lie to me. Ha! John Kane, we are well met. It's many a year since I saw you last, and I supposed you were dead or in prison, but villains live when honest people die—unless helped out of the world!"

There was a significance in this addition which made Kane turn pale, and he looked at King Ryer with eyes that momentarily grew more wild and startled.

"I was only a servant," he said, humbly, "and I had to obey orders. It wasn't my fault—"

"Enough!" interrupted King Ryer, stamping angrily on the floor. "I will admit that you are a coward, and imagine the rest. Your master, John Kane, is dead, but you still live."

The burglar shivered. That terrible gaze seemed to chill his blood.

Jaunty Joe, too, felt deeply impressed as he lay under the boat. Plainly, these men were old enemies, or, at least, he who was called King Ryer had a bitter grudge against the other, and Joe knew not what he might have. Gypsies' reputations are not generally good, and if Ryer saw fit, nobody could prevent him from squaring the account with Kane then and there.

Suddenly the boy jockey had a new surprise.

Interested as he was in this scene his gaze somehow wandered past them all, and, in the remote shadows, he saw a girlish figure standing and looking at the scene near the light.

He could tell no more about her, nor gain any view of her face, and his attention was suddenly called back by an exclamation from King Ryer.

"Bind this man!" he added. "Death ought to have had him long ago, and I'll help him to his own if I hang for it."

"You wouldn't kill him?" hesitatingly asked a second Gypsy.

"Wouldn't I?" echoed King Ryer, fiercely. "I'll tie a stone to his neck and sink him in the lake!"

CHAPTER IV. THE LAKE CRIME.

THE situation was growing intensely exciting and Joe Baldwin almost imagined he was having a painful dream. The nearly barren boat-house, lighted only by the single lantern; the terrified burglar; and the dark-skinned people who had so suddenly and unexpectedly appeared on the scene—all were so out of the usual order of things that the boy might well be excused for doubting the evidence of his own eyes.

But all was real—terribly real—and it was plain that the stern Gypsy chief meant to do all that he threatened.

So thought John Kane, and he flung himself on the floor at King Ryer's feet.

"Spare me! spare me!" he cried. "Oh! I wasn't to blame; I only did what he told me. It wasn't my fault. Oh! save me! save me!"

The Gypsy spurned him with his foot.

"Get up, you coward!" he ordered.

Kane did not obey, and Ryer seized him by the shoulder and dragged him up to his knees.

"I wish I had him here!" he hissed, his face convulsed with fury, "but 'tis too late to think of that. You live, and you shall suffer!"

The burglar continued his pleadings, but he was bound by the chief's followers. The latter

seemed reluctant to touch him, but they dared not disobey. Whatever calamity might befall them for doing it, they must carry out King Ryer's orders.

"Go and see how deep the water is near the boat-house," Roger added. "We may have to row out upon the pond."

Kane began to plead again, but the chief stood with folded arms and looked at him with a dark, gloating smile on his face. Just beyond him, too, Joe could still see the girlish form, but if the Gypsies saw her, they gave no visible evidence of the fact.

The burglar raised his bound hands and brushed them across his forehead, from which perspiration, called there by utter fear, was pouring.

"Mr. Ryer," he said, eagerly, "if you will spare my life, I can tell ye something of importance."

"You can tell me nothing that I will hear."

"I can give you the secret of a pile o' money."

Ryer answered with a disdainful gesture.

"Remember, your band is poor," Kane urged.

"You cannot make them rich."

"I can. Spare my life, and I will tell you where gold is buried—genuine gold coin."

"Bah! if you knew, it would not long remain buried."

"But I can't get it without you. Listen to me, King Ryer, don't turn away. It is Claude Clarkson's buried money, and you know he did bury it. You have the secret cipher which tells where it is, but you can't read it without the key. I have the key—spare my life, and it shall be yours. Oh! King Ryer, spare me! spare me!"

At this moment the men who had been sent away returned with their report.

"The water is twelve feet deep by the wall outside the boat-house."

"Deep enough for our purpose."

King Ryer answered readily, but in an absent way. He was looking at John Kane, and as the latter saw that he had produced an effect, he redoubled his efforts.

"I'm telling the truth," he declared. "Everything is just as I say, and I know where the money was buried. Set me free and the secret shall be yours—the secret and the money. It will make you and your men all rich."

The chief glanced at his followers, but did not reply.

Such an alluring bait had naturally made a commotion in his mind, and coming from any one else, it would have been snapped at greedily. He and his people were poor, wretchedly poor, and he would gladly have seen them placed beyond want, especially one of them.

But the hatred of long years still burned in his breast, and urged him to turn his back on everything else and satisfy his revengeful craving.

"There's a pile o' money," urged Kane.

"How do you know?"

"He told me so."

"It may be gone."

"I'm sure it is not."

"How do you know he didn't dig it up himself?"

"He lost his mind, and was taken to the asylum."

"Have you any idea where the money is?"

"No; but the cipher you hold will tell all that. I've known it for years, and I'd had the paper if I dared, but I didn't. I thought if you'd let me alone, I would you. But I'm willin' to tell, and give up all share in it. Take it, and you and your band can live all the rest o' your lives in idleness and luxury."

The burglar spoke with feverish anxiety, looking beseechingly at the Gypsy king.

The latter walked back and forth several times in silence, his gaze riveted on the floor. He was moved by rival emotions which urged him in exactly opposite directions. To which was he to yield? Should he make terms with Kane, and secure riches for his people, or satisfy his desire for revenge?

Kane watched him with feverish eyes, and Jaunty Joe, realizing that it was a matter of life and death, was painfully interested.

He had never seen a more somber, impressive scene, and, brave as he was, he shivered as he looked at the bound man and his stern judge. In the painful interest of this scene he forgot all about the girlish figure at the rear of the boat-house.

Suddenly King Ryer stopped and wheeled upon Kane.

"No!" he said, in a hard, stern voice. "Your craven plea won't save you. I scorn your offer."

and his gold. My followers shall never be enriched by such means. You shall die!"

The burglar uttered a wild cry, and flung himself at the chief's feet again. That cry rung in Joe's ears for days afterward, but King Ryer was unmoved by it. If anything, it was music to his ears.

He spoke a few words in a strange language to his men, and they came forward and raised the bound wretch in their arms. He still pleaded, but King Ryer turned sternly aside, his face dark and inexorable.

"Melvina shall be avenged!" he muttered.

Then, turning to his men, he added:

"Take him to the water and throw him in. I will go with you, for I want to see the last of a villain who has been a curse to the human race. Bear him away!"

Then the whole party moved toward the lake, through the building, John Kane in their midst. He cried out once or twice, and then all was still. Joe suspected that his mouth had been bandaged, or something of that kind.

The young Horse King was filled with horror, but what could he do? At least five strong men were there, and he had seen enough of King Ryer to know that it would not do to arouse his anger. He could not rescue the burglar alone, and before help could be brought from the village, all would long have been over.

Ha! what was that?

A hand touched the boy's arm, and he looked out to see a small, dusky face near his own. He remembered the girlish form in the rear of the boat-house, and recognized it now, but the fact that he was discovered startled him.

"Come out!" said a quick, eager voice.

"There's a chance for you to get away now, and nobody knows when there'll be another. Hurry! Nobody but me has seen you."

"Who are you?" asked Joe, mechanically, for he was too much surprised to even think clearly.

"I'm Melvina Ryer, and I'm a Gypsy; but you don't care who I am just now. You want to get away, or you'll have to stay under the boat all night. See?"

Joe did see, and he crawled out without delay. He comprehended that the girl, of all the band, had discovered him in his strange refuge, and was now anxious that he should get away.

"You'd better go out of that door on the run," she added, "but I want you to promise one thing."

"What is that?" asked the young Horse King.

"Never tell what you've seen and heard here."

Joe hesitated.

"Only for us that other man would have killed you," she added, more emphatically.

"But—"

Just then both saw a shadowy form moving near the boat-house door through which Joe had intended to go. They realized that one of the band was on guard there, and the girl quickly drew Joe back into the deeper shadows.

"Don't let him see you," she added. "I don't know what they would do if they found you here just now. Can't you escape through a window?"

"Yes."

"Then you'd better go."

But, Joe was not in so much of a hurry. He had even forgotten John Kane in the interest suddenly aroused by his new acquaintance. He had looked at her as closely as possible, and this is what his eyes had discovered:

She seemed to be thirteen or fourteen years old, and was tall and slender for a child of her years. The garments which hung upon, rather than fitted, her form, were incongruous. Her face and hands were naturally very dark, and sun and wind had now made them swarthy, while the hair, which clustered thickly, wildly, over her head was jet black. Her eyes were of the same hue—great, dark orbs that looked almost unnatural.

Joe understood that she was one of the band, but he felt a strong desire to know more about her. Plainly, she was what is commonly called "smart;" decidedly so; and he found himself thinking, even then, that she ought to have a better lot than to live and die with the wild Gypsy band.

"What's your name?" he bluntly asked.

"Melvina Ryer. You've just asked me once before."

"I wasn't sure I heard right. Are you King Ryer's daughter?"

"No."

"What then?"

"He's my grandfather," the girl answered, with evident reluctance; and then she more energetically added: "What is that to you? You

must go away, and forget all that you've seen; it'll be better for you. And you know I am helping you away. You ought to be grateful. Go, and never tell a live soul what you have seen to-night, for—"

Splash!

It was a deep, heavy sound from the lake.

"Great heavens!" gasped Joe, "they've thrown Kane into the water. Murder is being done. Let me go—I'll save him!"

CHAPTER V.

THE LAKE MYSTERY.

UNDER the impulse of the moment Jaunty Joe was about to start away to carry out his resolution, regardless of the fact that such a movement would take him directly into the presence of King Ryer and his men, but Melvina grasped his arm and held him back.

"No, no!" she exclaimed. "Don't go there—they will kill you!"

"But they have thrown the prisoner in the lake!"

"He deserved it."

"What has he done?" Joe cried.

"I don't know, but King Ryer is a just man. He would not do such a thing without good reason."

"Reason or not—"

Joe paused, not thinking it prudent to say what was in his mind, and then seized Melvina's hand.

"Good-by," he said, hurriedly. "Thank you for the interest you have taken in me, and—I'll see you again!"

As he spoke the last words he turned away and ran to the window. It was open, and as there was no one to stop him, he had only to leap out. In a moment he was on solid ground.

Only one thought was then in his mind; to rescue John Kane from his watery grave. Villain though the man might be, he could not stand idly by and see a human life thus taken. The Gypsies might look lightly on such a thing, but not he.

He ran around the corner of the boat-house.

Already King Ryer and his men had disappeared from view, and there seemed to be no one to interfere with his purpose. Quickly he threw off his coat, and then, without further delay, lowered himself into the water. He was a good swimmer, and hoped to find Kane's body and bear it to the shore before life was extinct.

As he did not know the exact spot where the body had been thrown in, it was, in a double sense, a search in the dark, but he shot down into the depths of the water like a diving expert.

Then began the search, and he felt about for the body as long as he could remain under water, but found nothing. Then he arose for air, recuperated his energies, and went down a second time.

He scored a second failure.

Regardless of the proximity of the Gypsies, he continued the search until it seemed that every foot of the ground near the boat-house had been thoroughly searched, but without avail. Not a sign could he find of the burglar's body.

By this time he knew that the body could not be recovered with life in it, and he sat down on the bank, tired and discouraged. What was he to do next? The answer seemed plain enough; it was his duty to go to the village and promptly lodge information against the Gypsies.

He remembered Melvina and felt regret that he must bring trouble upon her, after the kindness she had shown, but, whatever John Kane had been, it was a dark deed that had been done and his duty was clear.

He must inform the authorities at once.

He could hear the Gypsies in the boat-house, but, without waiting to investigate them, he started for the village with his few garments dripping water at every step.

It was not a great distance, but the worst delay occurred when he reached there. He did not know where the local officials lived, and at that hour of the night they were only to be found at their houses. His experience was not encouraging.

The first man he aroused persisted in regarding the matter as a joke, and the next was not an officer; but the latter agreed to take the boy to some one who was; and after a good deal of delay a party was formed to capture the Gypsies and recover the burglar's body.

They went to the vicinity of the boat-house and carefully surrounded it.

Then they advanced to capture the swarthy-faced people.

Not a sound was to be heard inside the build-

ing, and they pushed on and entered boldly. Several lanterns had been brought, and the light of these was thrown around the place.

Not a Gypsy was to be seen.

At first it was thought they had concealed themselves somewhere and a thorough search was made, but it brought about only one result; it showed conclusively that the wandering people were not there. Not a person except the searchers was to be seen.

The leader of the party looked doubtfully at Joe.

"Young man, is this a joke?"

"A joke? Certainly not, sir."

"Then where be the Gypsies?"

"I suppose they feared the consequences of their crime, and have fled," Horse-King Joe answered.

"Has anybody seen Gypsies round here?"

"I ain't."

"Nor I."

Others gave similar testimony, and Joe's face flushed.

"I am sorry to see that you have so poor an opinion of me," he said, "but there may be signs to prove that I have told the truth. If we can't find the Gypsies, let us look for evidence of their presence here a short time ago."

They did so, and found some bread-crumbs and other things at the further end of the building. These, Joe felt sure, had been left by the Gypsies, but as picnic parties sometimes lunched in the building, it was no actual proof.

It was decided to search the water for the burglar's body, and a man who had once been a professional diver around New York and Brooklyn, went down as Joe had done a short time before.

He made what he called a thorough search, but found no body.

Opinion was by this time divided on the subject, and while all had given up the idea of a practical joke, it was thought by many that Joe had dreamed it all. The entire party agreed that it would be best to postpone all search until the following day.

The leader invited Joe to accompany him to the village, and though the young jockey at first politely declined, he agreed when he discovered that the officer did not wish to lose sight of him.

A messenger was sent to Mr. Perkins's, and Joe went to the village, uncertain whether he was a witness or a prisoner. If the Gypsies were not found, the case of John Kane might yet make trouble for him.

He slept no more that night, though given a chance and well used by his new host. In the morning he had a good breakfast, and, immediately after, Mr. Perkins made his appearance, driving his old mare.

"Land o' Goshen! boy, what's this I hear?" the honest farmer asked, in great surprise.

"Well, you see I had a lively night."

"I should say you did, rather. Hev them Gypsies been found yet?"

"No; and they are trying to make me believe there wern no Gypsies at all," Horse-King Joe gravely replied.

"They be? Wal, they're off there, fur Eli Blodgett seen 'em pass his house jest afore dark. But about the burglar. What in tarnation did he want in my house?"

"Do you want my opinion, sir?"

"Sartin, I dew."

"I may be wrong, so I only say it to you privately; but it is my opinion that he came as an agent of Jasper Banker."

"Hey? That so? Gosh! what was the idee?"

"I suspect that if he could have entered my chamber as he intended, secretly, he would have got some drug into me, or in some other way have injured—perhaps merely weakened—me, so that I could not have mastered Black Jack."

"Land o' Goshen! what a villainous idee!"

"Remember, Mr. Perkins, there is no proof whatever of this, and it will not do to repeat it to any one whatever. Let that part be a secret between you and me."

"I guess you're about right. Amaziah Ingalls got fixed for two hundred dollars fur libel last year, and I'd hate peskily to hev him git the laff on me."

"Yes; and then again, westand a better show of getting a hold on Banker, if he is the guilty party, by keeping quiet."

"Jes' so. Wal, I'll hold my tongue."

The party went to the lake with rude contrivances improvised for dragging the bottom of the water, but no body was found; nothing but a few stones, and one or two water-soaked logs.

It had been clearly established, however, that a number of Gypsies had been in the vicinity, and when Perkins gave an opinion emphatically

in Joe's favor, no one thought of doubting his word.

It became the general opinion, however, that instead of being thrown into the water to drown, Kane had in some way broken his bonds and leaped in freely to elude his enemies, and thus escaped.

Jaunty Joe did not agree with them. He felt positive that the cords had been tied too securely to admit of their being thus cast off, and he was left deep in wonder as to how the affair had really resulted.

If the burglar had been drowned, his body ought to be in the lake; but it was not there.

Search was made for the Gypsies, but they seemed to have mysteriously disappeared. Those who had seen them had seen no wagons or horses, nor had they seen a girl; no one except men had been seen, and the searchers had no clew to work upon.

Mr. Perkins took Jaunty Joe back to his house.

The latter was not feeling well after his severe experience of the previous night, but he had plenty of pluck, and would have taken hold of his job on Black Jack at once if the farmer had not peremptorily forbidden it.

He said that Joe was not in his usual condition, and declared that nothing should be done until the next day.

Black Jack, however, was decoyed to the stable and placed in a large, well-lighted compartment, and the young tamer spent the greater part of the afternoon in his sight.

It was a part of his creed to win the confidence of his "pupils" as far as possible, and though Jack was shy and defiant, he did not disdain to accept what pleased his royal appetite from the young trainer.

He also learned to see him as a companion.

While quietly carrying out his plan, Joe thought a good deal about the events of the previous night. They were decidedly puzzling and mysterious; the only thing that was clear was that King Ryer had a bitter grudge against John Kane.

It was impossible to say what had caused it.

Naturally, the boy's thoughts dwelt a good deal upon Melvina. He had not seen her very distinctly, but she had made an impression on his mind which he was not likely to soon forget.

And the story of buried gold told by the burglar? This might be only a fiction invented to save his life, but Joe believed he had spoken the truth, and ever in his mind was one question—"Where is the gold buried?"

CHAPTER VI.

BLACK JACK.

WHEN evening came no new light had been thrown upon the boat-house mystery. The Gypsies and the burglar had alike disappeared, and all efforts to find them had thus far proved unavailing.

Telegrams had been sent in various directions, but the same answer came from all quarters. It was as though the earth had swallowed the whole band, including Kane.

The following morning Jaunty Joe announced that he was in as good condition as ever, and should try his hand on Black Jack, but Mr. Perkins's enthusiasm in the matter was a good deal dampened by the appearance, just after breakfast, of Jasper Banker and his men, the French tamer.

They had at once taken a train away from town after leaving the farm before, and Perkins hoped he had seen the last of them, but here they were again, and Banker's manner was as light and easy as ever.

"Ha! friend Perkins, how are you? Thought I'd drop in on you again, as I was passing on the train. Have you had him in the shafts yet?"

"Had who?" sourly asked the worthy farmer.

"Black Jack."

"Reely, I'd rather not say. Hev you been ter the moon sence I seen ye last?"

"Only half-way."

"You orter kept on, b'mighty!"

"I'm like you—satisfied with Long Island," answered the turf-gambler, his easy smile seeming, as Mr. Perkins afterward said, "ter hev froze there."

"But, about Black Jack," Banker added.

"How has the boy made it thus far?"

"First class. Joe is well named the young Horse King."

Banker's face fell.

"Has he really subdued him?"

"As fur as he's gone, yes."

"How much has he done?"

"Nothin'. He begins ter-day. And now, Mr.

Banker, don't you think you are a *leetle* too anxious about Black Jack?"

"I am this anxious," replied Jasper, not in the least vexed; "I'll give you two hundred dollars for the brute as he stands, broken or unbroken."

"Thank you, but it can't be did."

"Remember that, even if he is broken—and I don't believe that stripling can do a thing with him—it will afterward take a very shrewd, experienced horseman to manage him. Nobody around here could do it."

"Umph!"

"Now I am willing to buy him as he is, and he'll be worth far more to me if Professor Lacour has entire charge of his taming, than if a green hand had tried him and failed. That will make the brute vicious, and even a good man may never be able to do anything with him. Keep that boy away from him, is my advice. Perkins, I'll give you two-fifty for the animal as he stands."

"Couldn't think on't."

"Three hundred!"

"Mr. Banker," quietly drawled the farmer, "I'm sorter busy ter-day, for, arter Mr. Joseph Baldwin tames Black Jack, him an' me is goin' ter ride arter the hoss, an' then I've got ter weed them onions over thar—beats all how weeds will spring up in onions—so I can't stop ter talk an' dicker. As fur Black Jack—"

"I'll give you three-fifty, and it's my last offer."

"Glad on't, by gracious. Black Jack ain't fur sale ter you nor nobody else, ter put it plain. Mr. Baldwin, be you ready?"

"I am, sir," Jaunty Joe replied.

"Then we'll go out."

"If you're going to begin now on the horse, may we go along and see the fun?"

Banker addressed himself to Perkins, but before the farmer could answer, Joe wheeled upon the questioner and answered in a quick, but cool, voice:

"If you propose to behave yourselves, you can; but I don't intend to have any interference with my work."

"What do you mean?" blusteringly demanded the turf-gambler.

"I think I need not explain," Horse King Joe replied.

"By Jove! you need, and you shall. I want you to understand that I am not to be insulted—"

"That will do, Mr. Banker. Your wrath is all assumed, and your purpose is to make me so nervous that I can't do my work. It won't work. I'm not old in years, but I know the advantage of a cool head and good nerves, and you can't, and shall not, upset mine."

"Mr. Baldwin," added the farmer, emphatically, "if you say the word, there shall be no witness but me."

"These men shall come if they wish, but let them beware of trying to excite Black Jack. You see, Mr. Banker, you are not dealing with a greenhorn. Your only chance to see what is to occur is to maintain silence, and to begin now!"

He pronounced these words in an inexorable voice, and Banker actually turned pale with rage.

Angry words seemed trembling on his lips, but the Frenchman plucked at his sleeve and whispered something which caused him to curb his temper.

"Lead on!" he then said, briefly.

Perkins looked dissatisfied, but the whole party started for the stable, Joe leading the way and seeming as cool as though a trivial matter was on hand.

His caution had had due effect on Banker and Lacour, and they were very quiet as they brought up the rear, but an evil light twinkled in the former's eyes, and it was plain that he had not given up his plans, or abated one iota his hatred for young Joe Baldwin.

The young jockey entered the stable with an easy, careless manner, and occupied the first few moments in selecting a few choice handfuls of the fresh-cut grass upon which Black Jack had been fed since he was made a captive.

All the other men had been directed to remain outside, and as Banker noted the boy's deliberate movements, he felt not only annoyance, but a vague sense of impending danger.

Whatever the young tamer might do he clearly had full confidence in himself and his ability.

Having secured the tempting bits of grass, Joe sauntered up to the manger, which was merely an oblong, fixed box, and open at the front, and presented them to Jack's notice.

The latter recognized his companion of the previous day, and after some hesitation and a

good deal of wary cocking of his ears, slowly advanced and took a mouthful.

Banker and Lacour were dumfounded. Report and observation had led them to believe that Black Jack would not venture on even this degree of familiarity, after having been two months in pasture, as on the present occasion.

Jaunty Joe stood quietly while Jack enjoyed his mouthful, keeping his gaze fixed full upon the animal's, and talking to him as though he had been a human being.

Some of the letters shown Perkins by Joe had intimated that the youth magnetized his horses. However that might be, certain it was that Jack's great eyes grew almost wild.

Then the boy's unoccupied hand moved gently forward. Black Jack laid back his ears and eyed it doubtfully, seeming to be ready to spring away at the least warning. But the tempting grass was there, and he did not like to leave it.

He remained, and then Job Perkins's mouth opened wide as he saw the boy's hand placed caressingly on Jack's neck.

The horse, himself, seemed to think that this was a degree of familiarity which no circumstance could fully justify, but under the existing state of affairs he allowed it—probably under protest. Yet, for three years Farmer Perkins had not been able to handle him thus. He thought it wonderful.

Not once removing his gaze from Jack's eyes, the boy tamer continued to caress that proud, sleek neck, and nothing occurred to interrupt this sudden harmony.

"He's bewitchin' ze horse," said the ex-master of The Royal Government Equine Training and Equestrian Academy in a melancholy aside.

"Shoot me if he isn't!" Banker replied.

"Zis is not ze true trainin', sare."

"No, and it won't last."

"Don't you fret yer gizzards!" bluntly replied the farmer. "Ef the boy does his work, I don't care a red cent whether he's got the 'true' way or not."

"But, sare, it vell not last," urged Lacour.

"Not a bit of it," added Banker.

"Wal, jest you wait an' see. For the present b'ar in mind what Mr. Baldwin said, an' don't ye talk too loud. You might stir up the hoss's Ebenezer. Don't ye do that!"

The farmer spoke with more emphasis than he was aware; enough, certainly to let the two sharpers see that their only hope was to keep quiet. To talk would be to have an order promptly served on them to quit the place.

Joe now took a bride and sauntered into the compartment with the horse. It was twelve feet square, giving plenty of room.

Black Jack did not like this intrusion. He retreated as far as he could go, and then paused and looked at Joe in a startled way. The youth seemed in no haste to approach him. He sauntered around the place carelessly, while Jack became accustomed to the new order of things and lost his look of fear.

He was a splendid animal, a shade above the average height and weight of his kind, but with every mark of the born race-horse. That kingly head, with its coquettish ears; that graceful neck which, somehow, seemed like that of a beautiful woman; those shapely shoulders and slender, clean and perfect legs—all these were of that order of horseflesh which, one instinctively feels, ought never to be degraded by mere labor.

His color was jet-black; one of those rare blacks which, at no time of year, fades away to brown; and the short, shining hair rivaled satin itself.

No wonder Black Jack was much sought after.

Finally Joe produced another mouthful of grass and moved gently toward the animal. Once more his gaze was on the horse's, and it never wavered. Black Jack did not resent his approach, nor try to escape, but stood like one in a dream. He saw the grass, and knew that he wanted it, but some deeper influence seemed at work upon him.

"Witchcraft!" whispered Banker in the distance.

Perkins gave him one glance which spoke louder than words.

Banker could construe it only as a warning.

He looked back. The boy tamer was caressing the "wild horse's" neck, while Jack contentedly chewed the new supply of grass.

Both Banker and the Frenchman were wild with rage. The result thus far gave promise of complete success—if Jaunty Joe had his own way entirely. The sharpers exchanged glances; Banker nodded, and a villainous trick had been resolved upon.

When they looked back, Joe had the bridle

over the horse's head. It was not yet arranged, and as Jack was once more very doubtful and shy, he was given plenty of time. Finally Joe settled it into place, buckled the throat-latch, and the bridle was fully arranged.

Black Jack was more ill at ease than ever, but Joe's patience seemed unlimited. Once more he gave him time, caressing his neck, and another point was won. Then he began moving him about the stable.

Here again there was some delay, but Jack yielded gracefully after a while, and was led around the place with docility which dismayed the sharpers and amazed Mr. Job Perkins.

Was this Black Jack, the "wild horse?"

Jaunty Joe glanced toward Banker and Lacour. He was ready for the next and crowning effort—work outside the stable—and despite the warning he had given them, he feared that they would make trouble.

He knew, if the others did not, just what hold he had upon the horse, and how easily it could be broken. The great question now was, to what point would the men carry their hatred of him? On their actions depended whether he would wholly conquer Black Jack as he had begun, or see him turned into a demon.

It was too late to move them on, and besides, he wished them to witness his triumph.

He threw open the stable door.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BOY TRAINER'S BATTLE.

As the door swung back, out came Joe and the horse, the latter moving with a quick, nervous tread, but still under good control, and the boy tamer felt sure that if all remained quiet he would keep his hold successfully.

But what he had feared, now came to pass.

Banker and Lacour had determined to break up this harmony, however they might show their hands, and as Black Jack came out with a restless toss of his proud head, Jasper put the scheme in effect.

"Look out for him!" he cried, in a sharp, penetrating voice, as though actually afraid, and then he beat a noisy, abrupt retreat, followed by the Frenchman.

His trick acted like a spur on the horse. He gave his head a toss, his eyes flashed, and the spell thrown upon him by Joe vanished at once. He gave a great bound which almost swung the youth from his feet, and dashing across the yard, was again the feared wild horse.

A wave of bitter anger swept over the boy's mind; he knew his enemies had done all this purposely, and he would have liked a few minutes' reprieve in which to attend to their cases; but having once started with Black Jack, he would not leave him until the matter was decided.

A temporary surrender would leave an impression on the horse's mind hard to remove.

Black Jack, however, was free from the spell, and determined to be free from all control, and the struggle which followed made Job Perkins's heart feel like lead in his breast. He fully expected to see Joe Baldwin killed.

With flashing eyes the horse tore about the yard with great bounds, and though Jaunty Joe hung to him gallantly, he could not control his movements. The bit, though jointed, was of an inferior kind, and might as well have been straight just then.

"Let him go!" cried Jasper Banker, from his perch on the wall. "Let him go, or he'll kill you!"

Mr. Perkins confronted the turf-gambler, whip in hand, his usually mild face full of wrath.

"Hush your cackle!" he ordered, sternly. "You've done enough already, darn ye, an' ef you holler any more I'll tan yer hide, I vum!" and Mr. Jasper Banker did not think it prudent to disregard the warning.

In the meanwhile, Jaunty Joe was continuing his battle. He had lost the control of the horse he had gained by means of such patience at first, and it was now a mere battle, with the odds, it seemed, in the horse's favor.

The boy was not long in seeing that he must make some change. He could not hold the animal, and in the way they were spinning about the yard his strength would soon become exhausted—thrown away in a helpless cause. It was a part of his creed to never alarm or excite a horse more than was necessary, but there was no other way in Black Jack's case.

He surveyed the smooth, well-rounded back of the horse, and then collected his energy for the grand effort. Desperate cases require desperate remedies, and he must fight Black Jack with his own weapons.

"Good gracious!"

The farmer uttered the characteristic exclamation in wonder as he saw Joe make a tremendous but light spring, and shooting upward, land on Black Jack's back like a professional acrobat!

He was almost as agile as a monkey, and before the horse fully realized the indignity to which he was submitted, his cool young tamer was fairly in position.

A sneering smile swept over Lacour's face. Making the effort as the boy had done without due means of backing up his position, he believed Joe would be cast away like ripe fruit.

"It's all up wiz him!" he said, to Banker.

Black Jack's eyes flashed and his nostrils expanded wonderfully. Rage and terror filled his mind, and he was, indeed, the "demon" the sharpers had been anxious to see him become.

He leaped away like a wild horse of the plains, and only the high walls of the yard kept him from leaving the narrow quarters in which he was confined. Dashing madly around, he tried to free himself from the degrading weight on his back.

Jaunty Joe, however, clung like a burr, and showed that he was a prince of riders. In fact, he seemed as little disturbed as though sitting on a trained saddle-horse.

But Black Jack was not yet done; his instinct told him there was another way of solving the question, and he suddenly reared on his hind legs until he seemed almost to be standing erect. Three times in succession he tried this, but Joe remained in place, easy, cool, but wary.

What he expected, however, came to pass.

As Black Jack went into the air for the fourth time he lost his balance and went over backward, falling helplessly to the ground. And Joe? Was he crushed under the horse?

Hardly! When the animal fell he slipped neatly to one side, escaping all danger.

Professor Lacour now expected to see him watch the horse and spring again upon his back as Black Jack arose, but Jaunty Joe had a way of his own for taming a horse. Banker's villainy had forced him out of his regular path, but he believed he still knew a better way than to let the horse race around the yard indefinitely.

Before Jack could rise he found his head pinioned to the ground by the cool-headed boy.

He struggled fiercely, but found, as many a horse had done before him, that while his head was down he was a helpless prisoner, and to rise was out of the question.

Joe had him captive!

Quietly the boy kept his place, and, as the horse rested from his useless struggles, he began to caress the glossy neck gently and, looking full into the great eyes, to talk soothingly.

"More witchcraft!" muttered Banker.

"Whatever it is," said Perkins, impressively, "I warn ye not ter interrupt. By gosh, you've done enough a'ready, an' I won't hev no monkeyin'."

"What have I done?"

"What hev ye done?"

"Yes."

"You've made all this rumpus, b'gosh! Mr. Baldwin had him as peaceable ez a kitten, an' you riled him all up."

"You're mighty suspicious," growled Banker.

The farmer gave him an expressive glance.

"We'll talk o' this later," he replied.

In the center of the yard all was strangely quiet. Joe continued to gaze into the horse's eyes, to caress his neck and talk in the old, soothing way; and the fire died out of Black Jack's eyes and he lay as passive as though asleep.

Lacour was wild with rage.

He knew now that there was more in Joe's way of taming than ordinary horsemanship, and as he saw the animal again yielding to the spell, his own hopes vanished. He longed to arouse the "demon" in the horse again, but the sturdy old farmer and his whip were only a few feet away.

Finally Horse-King Joe quietly removed his weight from Jack's neck and touched his shoulder.

"Get up!" he said, quietly.

Black Jack obeyed, but it was not with the spring of a wild horse; instead, his manner was quiet enough, and he seemed like one in a dream.

Joe gently pulled on the rein.

"Come!" he said.

The horse obeyed, and was led unresisting to the stable door. He entered gladly, and for a moment both he and the boy jockey were invisible. Then Joe came out, closed the door and advanced toward the trio by the wall.

"We will let Jack rest a while," he said, coolly. "He is quiet now, but his nerves had

not assumed the normal state in which I desire them when I continue my work. Mr. Perkins, have you any more business to transact with your visitors?"

He nodded toward Banker and Lacour.

"By gracious, no!"

"Then I would suggest that they be allowed to go their way. We can do without them here."

"I'm not to be ordered off by you!" cried Jasper, flushing with anger.

"By gosh, you are by me!" retorted the farmer. "We've had all we want o' you, mister, an' the sooner you huff it away the better. You needn't come back ag'in either; I've had enough o' your style ter last quite a spell."

"Same here," put in Joe in a hard voice. "You did your level best to have Black Jack worst me. I had him under good control, and you would have seen him handled here as quietly as I began, only for you."

"Me? I did nothing."

"You purposely excited him, so as to break the hold I had upon him, hoping I would be defeated. Your purpose was plain; it is useless to deny it."

"That's solid, added Perkins.

"How dare you accuse a gentleman of such a thing?" blusteringly demanded Banker.

"I merely tell the truth."

"You tell no part of the truth, and I want you to know I did not come here to be insulted by a country clodhopper."

"You'll git a country whip laid over yer hide ef you ain't careful," declared Job Perkins.

"You needn't think you can bully me or my frien' on my own farm. Mr. Baldwin hez this matter down fine, an' you kin take what he says an' git out as soon ez you please. Your man an' team is waitin' fur you by the house, an' if you go right along you'll jest ketch a train west."

"I'm in no hurry to take a train."

"You'd better be in a hurry ter git off'n my premises. Somehow, you seem ter p'izon the air 'round here. Now, I'm a man o' peace, member o' the Orphans' Aid Society an' a town officer, but thar is sech a desire in me ter use this 'ere whip on ye that I'm afeerd I can't hold in much longer. You'd better go!"

Banker's face was red with anger, and as he believed he could whip both his enemies, he felt a strong desire to do it at once, but he had prudence enough not to attempt so rash a thing.

"It is beneath my rank in life to indulge in any such low, vulgar quarrel," he said, loftily, "and I will leave at once. You have insulted me grossly, but it is all I can expect from one like you. Come, Lacour, we'll go."

"You'll git more than you expect, ef you don't look out," said the farmer, nervously handling his whip.

But Jasper and his tool strode away without further talk and were soon in the carriage, moving toward the village.

"Ah! zis is ver' bad!" sighed the Frenchman.

"The end is not yet!" declared Banker, with a scowl.

"Vat more can we do?"

"That remains to be seen, but I'm not through with Black Jack yet. I'll either have that horse or kill him!"

CHAPTER VIII.

STRANGE DOINGS AT NIGHT.

A WEEK passed.

During this time the search for the Gypsy band, and for the burglar, was continued, but nothing was found of any of the lot. People had become more acquainted with Joe, and nobody then thought of doubting his story, but it remained a fact that all the "wanted" people had vanished completely.

Investigation had shown that John Kane was not at the bottom of the lake, and it was believed he had escaped and made his way back to Brooklyn or New York.

As for King Ryer and his band, they were credited with an unusual amount of cunning, and nobody expected to see them again—and nobody, unless it was Horse-King Joe, wished to see them. He spent a good deal of time in thinking about the stern old chief and his vendetta; and quite as much in thinking about the girl who had so strangely flashed upon his life for a brief period of time.

Melvina Ryer!

Gypsy or not, the name and the face hovered persistently in his mind.

Every day he devoted time to Black Jack, and it was one of the greatest sights of the town to see him driving the once-wild horse, with Mr. Perkins as a passenger.

For Jaunty Joe had effectually conquered the animal, and that, too, without another wild

struggle. Whatever his power over the brute kind, he had handled Black Jack as though the animal had always been a pet.

It was the wonder of the town. It seemed marvelous that the horse could be subdued so quickly, but not only did Black Jack yield, but he seemed to have the deepest affection for his trainer. Distinguishing him from among whoever called to see him, he gave every evidence known to his species that he loved Jaunty Joe, and heartily entered into everything the boy asked him to do.

Joe Baldwin was voted a wonder, a magician, a prodigy, a meteor, a king of horse-trainers, and everything else that went in the line.

He had taken the town by storm.

Those who had believed that Black Jack possessed great speed saw their predictions realized. Whether under saddle or in harness, the horse did wonderfully well, and Joe began to think seriously of putting him in a race before the season closed—for Mr. Perkins was more than willing.

The youth believed that, with a little practice, the noble black would be easy to handle in a race. Now that he was subdued, his natural disposition proved to be most even and affectionate, and the boy had learned to love him, as only a noble horse can be loved.

Never before had Joe been so interested, and he resolved that Black Jack should yet make his name and fame on the race-course.

Joe and Mr. Perkins were on such excellent terms that the farmer would gladly have had him remain all summer and improve the horse, but Joe had two or three engagements which he could not possibly get rid of, one of which called him away a week after the events of the previous chapter.

He was to ride a well-known horse in a saddle race, and felt compelled to take at least three days' practice before entering the field. The horse he was well acquainted with, having ridden him before, but he had never been in the town before.

He made the journey—a distance of forty miles—and went to work with his usual zeal, though he believed that the race could be won without great exertion. He had the best horse, and though it was to race with a handicap, had no fear of losing.

The town was an old one, with plenty of houses which looked as though they might have been standing a hundred and fifty years before, and one in particular soon arrested his attention.

It was a large, rambling edifice, which stood on a hillside, and was surrounded by at least three acres of land, which had once been a well-kept inclosure, devoted solely to ornament and comfort.

Its sacred limits were now the recreation ground, not solely of human beings, but of cows and sheep, and its glory was forever past, it seemed.

Joe mentioned it to the owner of the horse he was training.

"Used to be our crack residence," was the reply. "Seth French lives there now, and his only creed is to make money; but it was a grand old place when Mortimer Banker lived there."

Joe started a little. The name "Banker" had recalled the turf-gambler to his mind, but he had no reason to suppose that the latter was connected in any way with the old mansion or its owners of bygone days.

"He must have been rich."

"Yes," rather hesitatingly replied the citizen "at least, he was once. He inherited plenty of cash along with the house from his father, but Mortimer was a wild blade, and died poor. His son was left nothing, for the house and land were heavily mortgaged; but I reckon Jasper did his part to scatter the seeds."

"Jasper? Who was he?"

"Son of Mortimer."

"Jasper Banker."

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"Isn't he a sporting man?"

"Yes."

"I've heard of him in connection with races. So he used to live up there?"

"Born there, and passed his boyhood there. He was sent to college somewhere when nineteen years old, stayed a year, run away—and the Lord knows how he's lived since."

"Does he never come here now?"

"As often as we want to see him; runs down to the races now and then. His stock is 'way down with us, and we don't even want him around the race-course. 'Tis said that he gets his living by card-playing and gambling on races; and I've been told on the sly that many a

countryman in New York and Brooklyn bewails the day he met Jasper 'by chance.'"

"Confidence man, eh?"

"I don't say so, and you'd better not, for I, for one, can't prove it. And now let us drop the scamp."

Jasper was dropped, but the old mansion now had additional interest to Joe, though he knew of no good reason why he should care where the turf-gambler had been born.

Several days passed, and then the race was run and won by Jaunty Joe. As he passed under the wire and made sure of first place, he glanced at the judges and then, somehow, looked at the assembled crowd.

Chance, or something else, brought one face among them into prominence—a scowling, malevolent face—and he looked once more upon Jasper Banker.

Yes, the turf-gambler was there, and whether he had been a better or not, it was clear that he bitterly regretted Joe's victory. He was soon lost to the boy's sight, but the latter did not value his triumph less because of this closing incident.

Joe's work was now done at the town, and he was ready to return to the Perkins farm, but as he could get no satisfactory train until the next day, he decided to remain one more night.

It proved to be a night of beautiful moonlight, but so intensely hot that life indoors was almost a burden. Up to ten o'clock Joe talked with his host, and then decided to take a stroll. He went away alone, and without regard to his course, so that when he found himself at the entrance to the old Banker grounds, it was really a surprise.

The house, which stood nearly a hundred yards from the road, was invisible through the thick tree-tops, but the place looked so inviting that he passed through the gate and along the broad, winding driveway. Ruins of past glory were on all sides. Rustic benches gone to decay; a fountain which no longer worked, and upon which stood a marble Cupid with its head gone; peaceful cows lying on the once well-kept lawn—all combined to make a striking scene.

The inhabited part of the house was dark, indicating that the family had gone to bed, but as he passed by the old wing, for many years deserted, he was surprised to see a light shining from one of the broken windows.

He went nearer, and saw that a ladder leaned against the wall, directly under the window.

This struck him as singular, and suggested robbery. But what was there in the old place to steal?

He stood several seconds in hesitation, and then, yielding to a desire to know more about the matter, cautiously ascended the ladder.

When he reached the top he found a vacant room. The light was in a room beyond, but that and whoever was there were alike invisible. He could hear the sound of voices and nothing more.

Up to this time he had no proof that any one was there without right, and he wondered afterward why he did not retreat and leave them alone, but he seemed to be urged on by some feeling he could not control.

He wanted to see what was being done.

Cautiously he stepped into the room. Not even a sash impeded his efforts, and the still firm floor did not betray his cautious movements.

He walked slowly toward the door of the next room, or, rather, the place where it had been, for the door was long since gone—used for wood, perhaps.

The position of things showed Joe that it would be risky to peer through the doorway, but there was one chance for him, and a good one. There was a closet in the first room, and the door was ajar. By entering there he could peer through the crack and see the interior of the second room.

He gained this position without making any betraying noise. Then he had his fill of discovery.

Three men were in the second room, and he had a good view of two of them. They were ill-dressed, disreputable-looking fellows with swarthy complexions and hair as black as night itself.

The third man turned slowly as Joe looked, and he could not avoid a start of surprise. That face was not new to him—he was looking at John Kane, the burglar.

He was surprised to see the man thus reappear, but all his attention now became fixed upon their conversation and movements. Kane held a tape-measure, and he looked at one of his companions and said:

"Well, ef that's settled, we'll go on. What does it say next? Seven feet east?"

"Yes."

The man who spoke held a paper in his hands, and he stood still while the other two measured seven feet along the floor, beginning from the corner of the old-fashioned brick hearth.

"Three feet north," added the man with the paper.

The distance was measured off.

"Four feet east," continued the last speaker. Again the others measured.

"Twelve feet west."

"Confounded queer directions," grumbled Kane, as the tape was again stretched along the floor.

"A queer man gave them."

"Yes. Well, are we all ready?"

"All ready."

"Then we'll begin to dig."

All this was heard by Horse-King Joe, and a startling suspicion rose in his mind. He remembered the buried gold which Kane had told King Ryer was somewhere to be found, and the statement that a paper existed which would give the clew to its hiding-place. Kane's present companions were of decided Gypsyish appearance, and they were about to dig for something.

What was it?

What, indeed, if not the buried gold which he had declared was in existence?

Joe grew excited, and watched the movements of the men with interest scarcely inferior to their own. Was he about to see a buried treasure revealed? It was an exciting thought to one of his years, and he forgot everything except the work in the next room. Never stopping to wonder how Kane happened to be associated with the Gypsies, lately his enemies, he pressed his face closely to the crack behind the door and breathlessly awaited the result.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TREASURE-SEEKERS.

KANE and his companions next produced a crow-bar and ax, and proceeded to tear up the floor at the point where their measuring had taken them. There was little or no fear that their operations would arouse the family, for the old wing was practically another building.

Only a loud sound would be audible in the inhabited part of the house.

It was not hard to raise the board, but as the floor was double they had to go further. The second did not start so easily, but that, too, was soon removed.

A yawning cavity was revealed below.

All three men dropped on their knees and began looking eagerly, while Joe stood on tip-toe and tried to do the same. It almost seemed as though he had a personal interest. But neither he nor the men saw any treasure, as the disappointed faces of the latter clearly revealed.

Kane went down on his knees and began running his hand around under the floor as far as he could reach. Then he arose, his face even more disappointed.

"Can we have made a blunder?"

"Not if the paper talks straight."

"Maybe the old man fooled everybody."

"Are you sure any gold was buried?"

"Certain," Kane quickly replied. "There ain't the least doubt about it; I've knowed it for years, but never knew where. Suspected it was outside the house until I read the paper."

"I ain't just satisfied with this paper," said the Gypsy, eying it with a frown. "It may be all right, but it seems to me like a mighty queer thing to bury money and then leave a paper like this to tell about it."

"My master was deranged mentally when he done it," urged Kane.

"He must have been," was the dry reply.

"Well, if this don't lie, we can't be fur from the gold. Go on with your work."

The crowbar was again brought into use, and more boards were raised. A yawning, wide cavity was soon made in the floor, but no concealed treasure gladdened the eyes of the searching trio. They paused again and consulted, all but Kane expressing a doubt that any gold was buried there or anywhere else near the premises.

The burglar was not so easily discouraged, though their ill-luck thus far was a dampener on his zeal. He declared that, having known the supposed burier of the treasure, he was prepared to swear that it was undoubtedly buried.

But where? There was the rub. They had the chart, but it seemed to lie, and no gold could they find.

Jaunty Joe remained a deeply interested listener, for he was now sure of two things. First, this treasure which they could not find was that

of which Kane had spoken to King Ryer. Secondly, the supposed hider of the money was Mortimer Banker—though Kane and Ryer had used a different name in the boat-house.

Joe was unable to see what connection the Gypsy chief could have had with Mortimer Banker, a man born to riches and high estate; but it was clear there was some striking drama in the bygone days.

Suddenly a slight sound at one side caused Joe to turn, and there he stood amazed and startled. In the doorway, only separated from him by the door of the closet, stood Jasper Banker.

It was an unwelcome discovery, for the boy jockey knew that Banker would be glad to accuse him of burglary if he could, but it was plain that Jasper did not thus far know of his presence there.

He was looking only at the trio in the other room.

"Well, gents, how do you make it?"

His voice broke in on their peace of mind in a most startling way.

All wheeled away in consternation, and then stood silently staring at the man in the doorway.

"Can I help you in anyway?" Jasper coolly added.

"Gads! it's young Banker!" muttered the burglar.

"Just so, worthy John Kane. I haven't seen you before in twelve years, but you look as natural as ever. Time has not made you handsomer, but, bless you, you couldn't grow uglier."

The treasure-hunters exchanged glances. Kane still looked alarmed, while there was that in the Gypsies' faces which might have frightened a timid man. They believed that if Banker showed a suspicion of their work, the only safe way was to forever, and at once, remove him. Better do that, they mentally argued, than to lose the treasure, if there was one.

Jasper glanced at the hole in the floor.

"Kane, what's being done here?"

"We're getting wood for a fire," said the burglar, feebly.

"Tis a cold night," was the ironical retort.

"I don't mean that; we want to cook some food."

"And in order to get it you tear up the floor, with great labor, when there is any quantity of old boards lying around loose. John, your yarn won't go down!"

"What business is it of yours, anyhow?" demanded one of the Gypsies, a dark scowl on his face.

"Oh! the law and I don't care a cent."

"Have you come here to betray us?"

"Certainly not."

"If I find you have, I'd as soon knife you as not," the Gypsy declared, darkly.

"Don't be afraid; I have no such intention. Our mutual friend, Kane, will vouch for me. I'm one of the white hen's chickens, ain't I, John?"

"You used to be," replied the burglar, plucking up a little spirit, and speaking dryly.

"Bet your boots I've not dropped off. Tell your friends so, and banish their dark looks. Gents, I'm all O. K., and you'll find me ripe for fun or booty. If there's a throat to be knifed, count me in."

Horse-King Joe shivered.

He realized that he was in the society of desperate men. Probably not one would hesitate at bloodshed, and Banker, at least, was his deadly enemy. He wished he was well out of the house, but while the gambler stood where he did there was no chance to escape.

It was close quarters with a vengeance, and if one of the desperadoes took a notion to look in the closet, Joe's chances of getting away with his life were few and small.

The Gypsies exchanged glances.

They were too many to take a partner in any such way, but they knew the value of closing dangerous mouths in some way or other. Jasper must not be driven off, and allowed to bring officers down upon them.

"You can stay if you want to," said the spokesman, in a surly voice, "but we are just going to bed."

"And give up digging?"

"Yes."

"Nonsense! Don't quit on my account, but let me get a hand on the crow-bar myself. I'll rip the old shanty all to pieces. I'm interested in this game, for I have a suspicion as to why you're at work. Kane, I always wondered where the old man had put out all his money, and I now tumble. So he hid it here, eh?"

The Gypsies glared furiously at the gambler.

"What are you talking about?" the spokesman growled.

"My father's buried money."

"Where is it buried?"

"Here, and you've been digging for it!"

Banker leveled one finger at the gap in the floor. Then he coolly stepped forward and picked up the ax.

"Come," he added, "let us go on with the work. I'll divvy with you all, even and square. Who cares who first owned the boodle? Come, what do you say—shall we search for the treasure together?"

"Search, and let me help you!"

Banker wheeled like a flash. The words had been spoken behind him, and the interruption was a startling one. Turning, he saw other dark-faced men who were very much like Kane's allies, but they were strangers to him, and the interruption did not convey anything in particular.

Not so with Horse-King Joe.

The man who had spoken, and who stood now, tall, dark, stern and forbidding, was no stranger to him.

It was King Ryer, the Gypsy chief.

Joe glanced from him to the three men first on the ground, and one look was enough to indicate trouble ahead. John Kane and his two friends were surprised, dumfounded and evidently terribly frightened. The burglar was very pale, while the two dark-skinned men began glancing about as though intending to dodge out and run away.

King Ryer saw this, and took measures to prevent it.

His first step was to swing the closet door to, which closed Joe in as a prisoner, but, owing to the fact that the old house had so settled and warped, still left a crack through which he could see all that transpired.

Then Ryer strode into the room, still looking at the two Gypsies.

"You needn't think of running," he said, in a hard voice, "for your retreat is cut off. The band are all here, and you will be shot down if you try to escape."

The men looked more dismayed than ever, while Banker glanced from one to another with a vague feeling that he had placed himself in a position of danger.

"Murdough and Lee," continued the chief, "you are traitors and scoundrels. You know the Gypsy law."

"Forgive us, King Ryer!" exclaimed Lee, in a sharp voice. "It wasn't our fault. This man made us turn against you."

He pointed to John Kane, but the latter's voice arose in accents rendered shrill by fear:

"It is not so; I never tried to make them turn against you. They did all willingly."

The chief commanded silence with an imperious gesture.

"Enough of this. I know all about it. Traitors, you cannot clear yourselves. When I ordered Kane thrown in the lake you deceived me, cast in a stone instead and saved my enemy. Why did you do it? Because he had said in your hearing that he knew where a treasure was buried. You saved him, deserted the band, joined hands with him and came here to find the gold. You cannot clear yourselves."

Lee and Murdough stood in utter silence.

King Ryer had spoken the exact truth, and they had such an opinion of his nature that they fully expected death as a reward for their treachery. Whatever he saw fit to do could be done, for the odds were against them, and they could expect no sympathy from their old comrades.

Jaunty Joe, still peering out of his narrow quarters, could not avoid a shiver. He was among desperate men; a tragedy was imminent and, if discovered, he would undoubtedly be one of the victims.

CHAPTER X.

CAPTURED BY THE GYPSIES.

KING RYER turned upon Jasper Banker.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"I merely dropped in to see what meant the light in the old wing," replied the turf-gambler, with wonderful humility—he did not know the dark chief, but could easily see that he would be a bad man to have for an enemy.

"Your name is Banker."

"Ye-es," was the hesitating reply.

"We are all well met to night."

Grim and suggestive was the chief's voice, and Banker felt a thrill of fear unusual to him. He saw more than a wandering vagabond in the stern old chief, and wished himself miles away from the paternal home.

Ryer turned to his faithful followers, spoke a

few words in a language familiar only to them, and then they came in and so surrounded Banker, Kane, Lee and Murdough that the four practically became prisoners.

Joe Baldwin was not yet free. The closet door had no means of fastening, but to leave while the Gypsies were there would surely result in discovery and capture, and he believed that this meant death.

The chief picked up the paper used by the trio during their search, looked at Kane and sarcastically said:

"Strange that you could not find the money with this sure guide."

The burglar's lips moved, but he made no reply.

Ryer tore the paper into small pieces.

"This is worthless," he said. "When I found Lee and Murdough had deserted, and learned that no body had been found at the bottom of the lake, I suspected all. My men, bewitched by talk of buried treasure, had saved you, hoping to get the treasure. To do this of course they would want the chart which I held—the only clew to the money. I made a paper very much like the old, except in certain points, and arranged it so that any one who wished to steal the forgery could do so easily. It was done, and you find yourselves all in the trap."

Lee and Murdough looked as though they hated themselves; they had sold themselves for no price.

"I was not in with them," said Jasper, timidly, wishing he could get permission to go.

"No."

Ryer was silent for a moment; then he slowly added:

"The buried gold was your father's. Do you want it?"

"Curse the gold!" Jasper exclaimed. "What I want is to get clear of the whole business!"

"You are like your father," muttered Ryer.

"Then you knew him?"

"Yes."

"When? Where?"

"Never mind."

The chief spoke quickly, a dark, ominous expression on his face, but seemed to make an effort to control himself. He then added in a deep voice:

"You profess contempt for the money. Well, you need not worry about getting it. The only clew to the place where your crazy father buried it was the secret paper I held. When I made the copy—and made it so incorrect as to be useless—I burned the original. The clew is forever lost!"

Every one of his hearers looked deeply disappointed, and his faithful followers most of all.

"Once," King Ryer added, "I was tempted to take that money and use it for my band, to help them in their poverty; but there was a curse upon it! Mortimer Banker's gold shall never stain Gypsy hands."

"Why do you hate him so bitterly?" Jasper asked.

"Don't ask; you had better not know."

The chief turned to his traitorous followers, pointed to the gap in the floor, and coldly said:

"You may dig here until you grow old; you will never find the treasure. The alteration I made in the chart has put you wholly on the wrong track. Now, are you ready for the reward of your treachery?"

Both men broke out in violent pleadings for mercy, but he sternly interrupted:

"Your lives are forfeit by Gypsy law!"

Again they tried to plead, but he called his faithful followers about him, looked around the circle, and said:

"We are seven. Let the vote be taken: white for life; black for death. Beags, take the vote."

One of the band took off his hat and passed around the circle. As he passed, the loyal Gypsies each dropped something in the hat. Reaching Ryer, he handed all to him, and then retired to his former place.

The chief removed the contents of the hat. In his hand he held seven small, round objects which may have been common beans. A disappointed look crossed his face as he held them up.

Only three were black.

Four were white, and the traitor Gypsies were saved.

"The vote is that you live," he said, "but you have had a narrow escape. I voted for death, and I wish all had done the same. You are saved, but never again can you belong to my band. I cast you out, and all the Gypsies I meet shall be warned against you. Go forth, outcasts, traitors, and may you never know peace again. Go!"

Lee and Murdough willingly rose, and lost no time in leaving the room and the house. They were certainly delighted at having escaped death, but they knew, if Joe Baldwin did not, how serious the decree of outlawry was, and they went as a Cain might have done.

Then the chief turned to John Kane.

The burglar trembled and his face grew paler than ever, but an agreeable surprise was in store for him.

"You are not worthy of my notice," Ryer contemptuously said, "and I will not place myself in the power of the law by molesting you. You can go where you will, but one thing rest assured—you will never find the hidden gold. Go!"

And the burglar gladly went.

Then Ryer looked at Jasper Banker.

"I have no quarrel with you. I and my men will leave the house now; you can go or stay, as you see fit."

"One word," said the turf-gambler, quickly. "If my father buried his money—and I am ready to believe he did, for there was a deficit for which we could never account—this money ought not to be lost. Aid me to find it, and I will share equally with you."

"Never!"

"Why not?"

"I would not touch a cent of his accursed money, while as for helping one of his race to profit by it—never! never!"

"Why do you hate him so bitterly?" Jasper wonderingly asked.

"That is my business."

"Did he wrong you?"

The Gypsy started and his face grew darker than ever, while his black eyes gleamed fiercely. Banker recoiled, and furious words seemed trembling on the chief's lips, but he controlled himself with an effort and answered in a voice which was almost calm:

"Let it be buried in his grave. I have nothing to say to you, as long as you keep away from me and my band. See that you do that—never let me see you again!"

With these words he nodded to his followers, and they quietly turned and glided from the house.

Jasper went to the window and thoughtfully looked after them for a few moments. Then he returned to the inner room and looked at the gap in the floor, which seemed to have a strong fascination for him.

Opportunity was now given Joe Baldwin to leave his place of refuge, and he did not lose any time in doing it. Opening the closet door he glided across the floor with as light a step as he could assume—so light that Jasper heard nothing and suspected nothing.

The boy lost no time in getting to the ground, and then hurried away, glad to bid the old house adieu. He thought himself very fortunate to get out of the scrape with a whole skin, and mentally vowed he would not be decoyed into another house in the night-time by a mysterious light.

He did not return to the road, but, deciding to take a more direct course across the fields, moved around to the rear of the place, and then hurried away through the maples toward his proper quarters.

As he went his thoughts were all of the peculiar scene he had just witnessed, and more than ever he wondered what had caused King Ryer's deep hatred of young Banker's father.

What old drama of the past had so excited the chief?

It seemed useless to wonder, for it was not at all likely he would ever know, but it was impossible to forget or to cease surmising.

It was unfortunate for him that he did not give more heed to where was going, for, without any warning he found himself seized by strong hands and borne to the ground.

He gave a bound like that of a startled deer, but all in vain. He was under the shade of thick trees, but the moonlight beyond was strong enough to show him that he was in the midst of several men.

Immediately he realized the fact that he had run squarely into the Gypsy camp, and as struggling was useless, he coolly submitted.

Despite his peril he thought of Melvina at that moment. He looked more keenly about him. He could see two or three women, but whether one of them was Melvina or not, he could not tell.

"What have we here?" asked a deep voice, which was easily recognizable as that of King Ryer.

"Nobody that will hurt you," quickly, coolly replied the young jockey. "I don't know who

you are, but I'm only a boy, and not dangerous in the least."

"I believe you are a spy."

"A spy? Lord bless you, what is there around here to spy upon? I'm no chicken-thief, but merely out for a breath of fresh air."

"Take him to the light!"

Joe was dragged where the moon fell on his face and then the chief took a good look at him. The boy did not fear recognition. Nobody except Melvina had seen him that night at the boat-house.

He smiled coolly into the Gypsy's face.

"Do I look dangerous?"

"You are no fool, and he who places that estimate on you would be badly sold; but you may mean us well. Do you live at the village?"

"No; over there."

Joe pointed correctly.

"What are you here for?"

"As I said before, only out for fresh air."

"You may be telling the truth, but you are too quiet to suit me. Most boys would be frightened in such a fix. Young fellow, I don't trust you; I believe you are a spy!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE MAN WITH THE WHIP.

JOE was not particularly frightened by the repetition of this charge, for the Gypsy's voice was not the terrible one he had used in the old house.

"I give you my word that I'm not a spy," he replied.

"Do you know who we are?"

"I suspect you are Gypsies."

"Consequently, we have no right here."

"In one sense of the word, you have no right on private grounds, but neither have I. The pot can't call the kettle black."

"How long have you been in this grove?"

"Five minutes, I guess. I passed along through, and am on my way home."

Ryer spoke a few words in his own strange language to those who held the boy, and then went to one side and consulted several minutes with one of his followers. Then he came back and quietly said:

"We have decided to take your word, and no harm shall be done you, but one thing I must insist upon. We are about to move, and must have a good start. To insure this, we must bind you to a tree, to keep you until morning, when you will, of course, be released."

Joe protested against this as strongly as he dared, asserting that he would go straight home and not mention them to any one, but King Ryer had more faith in stout cords than any person's promise.

He was not to be moved, and his order was at once carried out by his men. No roughness was used about it, and Joe was not foolish enough to make any disturbance. He did not like the idea of being tied to a tree all night, but it was better than to receive worse usage.

When he was disposed of the Gypsies began preparations for departure, while the boy silently watched. He looked more at the women than the men, wondering if Melvina was there.

One woman seemed to be of unusually slight figure, and he thought it might be she, but he had no chance to solve the question definitely.

The Gypsies traveled light, and it did not take them long to prepare for departure. When they were ready King Ryer again addressed Joe, warning him not to betray them, and then the whole party glided away like phantoms.

"Well, this is a pretty fix!" thought the boy. "Horses sleep standing up when they feel like it, but this is the first time I ever thought of trying it. Don't like the idea!"

He squirmed vigorously, but it took him only a short time to discover that the ropes were tied so tight that his efforts did not affect them in the least.

"It's an all-night job, sure enough. Whew! I don't like this; I shall get far more fresh air than I want. Wish I had gone to bed like a sober-minded citizen, and defied the heat. Can't turn over here when I get tired."

He was indulging in such melancholy thoughts, and considering whether it would be advisable to shout and try to attract the attention of honest people, when he heard a sound at one side.

Was it a Gypsy, a harmless cow, or—

A man sauntered into view, but Joe saw at first sight that he was no Gypsy. His general appearance showed, despite the darkness, that he was well dressed.

"Hallo, youngster!" he said, looking at the prisoner.

Jaunty Joe felt a thrill of alarm. He knew the man now; it was Jasper Banker. No won-

der the former was troubled. He was perfectly helpless, and believed that the gambler had the will to do him almost any injury.

The only hope was to escape recognition.

"Hallo!" he replied, trying to disguise his voice.

"You're in trouble, I see. Well, I always expected you would be, sooner or later. You have a way of meddling with other people's business that is villainous. I only wish the Gypsies had winged you."

Joe's hope was gone. Banker knew him, and he must face the danger.

"You are very kind," said the boy, coolly.

"Failing of mine. By the way, when do you go back to Black Jack?"

"I don't know."

"I believe you!" retorted Jasper, with a short, harsh laugh. "Things are uncertain on this mundane sphere. Only one thing is sure."

"I suppose you want me to ask what that is."

"Never mind, Josey; I'll tell you, anyhow. I'm going to first smoke a cigar, and then go and get a whip and lash you until I feel that we are square."

And the gambler struck a match and carelessly lighted his cigar. Then he sat down on the ground and began smoking quietly.

"Hope you're in no hurry."

"Not in the least."

Joe answered coolly, but he was far from feeling that way. He was helpless, and if Banker did not keep his threat it would be because he feared the consequences. As he was a desperate man, it was not likely he would let this stand in the way of revenge.

His cigar glowed in the darkness as he leisurely smoked and gloated over his enemy.

"You're always getting in my way, ain't you?" he said, after a pause.

"Give me a chance and I'll get out."

"No, you won't."

"Have I done you any harm to-night?"

"No. This is my night."

"How so?"

"I'm going to get square with you. When I get that whip, I'll mark you into a checker-board with devilish small squares, you bet."

"I warn you not to touch me."

"What can you do?"

"My day will come later. I know you of old, Jasper Banker, and just what sort of a gang you train with. If you lay a hand on me I'll devote all my time to getting the law of you, and I know about where to look for you."

"You can look and be hanged!" Jasper retorted, throwing away his cigar and springing to his feet. "If you think you can scare me you're mightily mistaken. I'll soon show you!"

With these words he strode away in the darkness, and Joe was again left alone. The chance was now given him to shout for help, but he had little hope that such a call would be answered. It was at least one o'clock, and the people in the farm-house were probably all asleep. If so, a shout was not likely to arouse them.

While he was still considering the matter, Banker reappeared.

He announced his coming by cracking a horse-whip which he carried, and then gave Joe a slight cut across the face.

"Are you all ready?" he asked.

"I'm ready to be left alone."

"Well, I'm going to flog you until you howl like a hyena."

"Jasper Banker, you had better think twice before you strike me," cautioned Joe, in a surprisingly calm voice. "Will you admit I have beaten you irredeemably with my head, and sink to such low revenge as this?"

"You can deliver your oration some other time, young Cicero; I'm going to make you sing now!"

And the turf-gambler swung back the whip for the first blow. But it did not fall upon the boy prisoner.

As it went backward it was suddenly snatched from Jasper's hand, and as he wheeled in astonishment the lash fell on his own face with cutting force.

He was not a bold man at all times, and without waiting to see whether his assailant weighed one or two, or three hundred pounds, he wheeled and fled, the idea strong in his mind that the neighboring farmer had appeared on the scene thus inopportunist. Despite his boasting, he did fear discovery; hence, his headlong flight.

Horse-King Joe looked in surprise to see who had created this timely diversion in his favor, and was much surprised to see a female figure advance. Nor was this all; as she came nearer he recognized her.

It was Melvina Ryer.

He uttered an exclamation of surprise; but she did better than to talk. She had a knife, and the quickness with which she cut his bonds was surprising.

"There you are!" she then said, bluntly. "And once more I owe thanks to you, Melvina."

"How did you know me?"

"Didn't we meet at the boat-house?"

"Yes, but I didn't suppose you would remember me."

"How can I forget one who did so much to me?"

"I only told you to scoot—run."

"That was a good deal, and now I owe you more. You have saved me from a ruffian this time, Melvina, and I shall never forget. Come into the moonlight, so I can have a fair look at you."

The girl hesitated a moment and then obeyed. She was as ragged and dark as ever—a true Gypsy, with wild, black hair straying down over her face; but it was a face many a girl of high birth and wealth would have been glad to have. Joe was not unconscious of all this.

"I can never forget such a pretty face," he said.

Melvina gave her body that quick twist which seems to be the habit of all very young girls when they begin to receive compliments, but Melvina Ryer was nearly free from the usual emotions of such of her sex as live in the limits of society; hers was an old head, and she gave it a toss and retorted bluntly:

"You needn't tell any lies for me."

"I don't intend to; what I said was true. Do you know, Melvina, I like you."

"Nonsense! I'm a Gypsy."

"I'm tempted to become one, myself, just to be near you," Joe asserted.

"Don't you do it!" said the girl, quickly.

"Everybody hates Gypsies."

"Well, they like each other, don't they?"

"Sometimes."

"Will you like me if I join your band?"

"Nonsense!" cried Melvina again. "Don't you talk so foolish, or I'll leave you—I've got to go anyway; I forgot how long I was stopping."

"Where are your people?"

"Gone. Never mind where. I came back on the sly, 'cause I didn't want you to be tied to the tree all night."

"You came just in time, for that infernal scoundrel of a gambler was about to flog me with the whip you so neatly deprived him of."

"Yes, by the fiends! and I'll do it now!" snarled a voice close at hand, and then out from the shadow rushed a man.

It was Jasper Banker.

CHAPTER XII.

HORSE-KING JOE SUSPECTS SOMETHING.

THE boy jockey's blood was up, and now that he was no longer bound to the tree, he was quite as anxious as Mr. Jasper Banker for a settling of their accounts.

Consequently, when he saw the gambler rushing toward him, he caught the whip from Melvina's hand, and then met Jasper with a blow which made the fellow roar with pain.

Nor did Horse-King Joe stop there. Again and again his arm rose and fell, and every time it descended the lash alighted stingingly on the gambler's head, shoulders or neck, until it seemed that a hundred hornets were stinging him.

Nobody else enjoyed the scene as much as Melvina. She was not made of the weak clay of civilization, and it was the result of her education that she thought it fun to see a man she hated subjected to such a punishment.

Jasper thought nothing of the kind, and as it occurred to him that he would soon be so disfigured that he could not appear in public for many days, he let this thought and the stinging lash overcome his warlike spirit.

Hurling a final curse at Horse-King Joe, who was proving himself also a tamer of men, he fled from the spot at full speed.

Melvina was delighted at the turn affairs had taken.

"Cricky! see him leg it!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, he seems in a hurry."

Both the young people were in good-humor, but they were too wise to stop in the grove any longer. Joe was aware that Banker usually, if not always, carried a revolver, and it would be just like him to come back and use it. Consequently, they made off as fast as possible.

After some persuasion Melvina confided the location of the new Gypsy camp to her companion, and Joe asked leave to walk with her to the place—or as near as was safe.

"You'd better go home and go to bed," was the girl's very practical advice.

"But I want to go with you."

"What for?"

"To admire the moon—and you."

Melvina gave herself another twist. None of the Gypsies had ever talked to her in this way, and though she could hardly see a tramp across the rough fields in a romantic light, she was pleased to have a well-dressed boy pay her such attention. They started, and Joe soon approached the subject which occupied his mind most.

"King Ryer is your grandfather?"

"Yes."

"Where are your mother and father?"

"Don't know. I never saw any, and don't know anything about them."

"Does your grandfather treat you well?"

"Nobody was ever treated better than he does me," Melvina quickly declared.

"Why does he hate John Kane, the burglar, so?"

"That's what I asked him, but he won't say."

This was a disappointment to Joe, who had hoped to get a clew to the mystery, and he found himself as far as ever from light. He continued his questions until convinced that Melvina was fully in the dark, and then changed the subject.

Melvina confirmed his previous opinion of her. She was bright and quick-witted, and though not educated, had learned so much from King Ryer—who, Gypsy or not, was an educated man—that she nearly always talked well.

Finally they advanced so near to the Gypsy camp that the girl would not hear of his going further, and there they parted. They believed it would not be forever. Melvina had said that King Ryer had spoken of a trip which would take them back through the town where Mr. Perkins lived, and as Joe was at once going there, they would probably meet again.

The youth walked back to his quarters like one in a dream, and all his thoughts were of Melvina. In his experience he had seen rich girls and poor girls, educated girls and ignorant girls; girls who were white, black and mixed; but never had he seen another like Melvina Ryer.

Horse-King Joe was back at Job Perkins's, and on all sides he had been warmly received.

Mr. Perkins's face beamed more than ever, and he looked over his spectacles with the air of a man who finds the world a happy place, despite the attempt of Adam and Eve to upset the harmony of the universe.

But no one else welcomed him with the joy manifested by Black Jack. That noble animal had shown perceptible signs of loneliness while Joe was away, and his return produced a corresponding elation. Jack knew him at once, and testified his joy in brute fashion.

It was Mr. Perkins's wish that Joe should remain on the farm and fit the horse for the track.

"I ain't never been a sportin' man," said the farmer, "nur put no hoss-flesh into a race, but I re'lly would like to see my name in print, once, ez a winner."

And so it was arranged that Black Jack should be entered for some of the fall races, and Joe set to work to fix him for the event. Every day he appeared with the black horse, and it was a common sight to see them dashing over the hills.

The young trainer gave him thorough trial both under saddle and in harness, and in both respects he showed admirable qualities, but Joe was inclined to believe that his strongest point was as a runner.

The youth did not let time pass in idleness. It will be remembered that Mr. Perkins possessed two other and younger horses, which were as wild as Black Jack had been. These Joe subdued. They were promising animals, though nowhere equal to Black Jack.

One of them the farmer sold when he was well under control, and he felt that the boy jockey's coming to the town had been a most fortunate thing for him.

A month passed peacefully. Nothing was seen or heard of Jasper Banker. He was not the kind of man whose name was likely to get in the papers through his connection with sporting matters, for he represented a class of hangers-on who can be hail-fellow-well-met with all legitimate members of the trade, and at the same time despised by all.

Silent as Banker was, Joe Baldwin did not forget him, and he felt sure that the gambler's memory was equally tenacious, and that Black Jack would never appear on the track without Jasper also coming to the surface in some way.

For a month there was no evidence that the outside world knew anything about Black Jack;

but one day, when the young trainer came out of the stable, he met Mr. Perkins and two strangers.

The boy flashed a quick look at them, for they were not like the ordinary residents of the town. They seemed to be master and servant, and the former had a highly respectable and almost ministerial look.

He was a tall, slender man of middle age, with a dark face which was smoothly shaven except for a small line of beard near each ear, and his dress was a sober black.

Perkins introduced him as Mr. Looker, of New Haven, Connecticut, and Mr. Looker bowed very politely, but did not shake hands.

He had heard of the name and fame of Black Jack, and had come to see him. They entered the stable, and he looked at the black horse critically. He soon proved that he knew something about horses, and spoke very highly of Mr. Perkins's property.

A long "horse-talk" followed, in which Perkins, Looker, and Joe took part, while the servant stood somewhat back and listened. Looker stated that he lived on Whalley avenue, in New Haven, kept two horses, and found most of his recreation in driving.

Finally, he came to the point of asking what Perkins would take for Black Jack. The farmer stated that the horse was not for sale. Mr. Looker said he was sorry, but, as the sequel proved, did not give up yet.

Looker proved that though he looked like a minister, he had the art of driving a bargain down fine, and if Perkins had not firmly resolved not to sell, Black Jack would undoubtedly have changed hands that day.

Beginning with a small offer Looker advanced his figures until he named the climax—five hundred and fifty dollars.

It was an offer which would have staggered Perkins two months before.

Horse-King Joe was very much afraid. Perkins would yield.

Mr. Perkins, however, did not hesitate a moment. His mild, beaming smile was as placid as ever as he replied:

"Sorry tew disappoint ye, neighbor, but one thousand dollars would not buy him; he ain't fur sale. I ain't a poor man, an' I'm goin' tew keep Black Jack fur my recreation."

Looker yielded gracefully, and next talked about the other young horse which, however, was only two years old. All this had taken up a good deal of time, and night overtook them before the matter was decided; so Looker asked if he and his servant could be quartered for the night.

Perkins readily agreed, but Jaunty Joe was not so well pleased. He might be wronging the New Haven gentleman, but he had a vague suspicion that Looker was there for no good.

CHAPTER XIII.

BLACK JACK'S PERIL.

MR. PERKINS was a hospitable man, and as he had no reason to believe that Looker was anything less than what he represented himself to be, he proceeded to make him welcome for the night, and show him that though the farm might be behind New Haven as regarded style, it was not so in point of comfort.

They went into the house, leaving Horse-King Joe to care for Black Jack. The youth carefully locked the horse in, while Looker's servant hung around and talked in what he probably thought an entertaining way.

"I say, does your biz pay well?" he finally asked.

"Fairly," Joe briefly replied.

"Been at it long?"

"Four years."

"Do you know, I've often thought of going into it. I like horses, and can handle the best of them when they are broke. I'd like to be a trainer."

"Well, the field is open to all."

"But how am I to begin?"

"That's for you to decide."

"If I'm here to-morrow, can I drive Black Jack?"

Joe shook his head.

"I shall have to say, no. It is a part of my bargain with Mr. Perkins that no one else shall handle the horse at all, you see."

"Are you going to put him in a race?"

Jaunty Joe grew wary.

"I don't know."

"He ought to win."

"You must remember there are other good horses."

"Of course, but you know there's always room for what's good. Have you any particular race in mind?"

This persistent questioning might mean nothing, but Joe did not like it at all. He would not show his own hand by indiscreet answers, however, so he replied in the most matter-of-fact way, as though he suspected nothing, and carefully locked Black Jack in. Then he led the way to the house.

During the evening nothing occurred to arouse fresh suspicion. Perkins and Looker did nearly all the talking, while Pratt, the servant, sat in a corner, listened and said very little.

Despite this, however, Jaunty Joe did not get any better opinion of the visitors.

The more Joe saw of the two men, the more he suspected that they were not what they seemed, and though Pratt seldom spoke, when he did say anything it was hardly with the manner of a servant in the presence of his master; it was more as though the two men were equals in every way.

Perhaps if he had not been looking for some underhand work all this would have gone unnoticed, but, as it was, he began to suspect that these men were equals; that they were directly connected with racing matters; and that they had come to the farm-house to buy Black Jack, not for a private driving-horse, but to put him on the track.

Believing this, another great question arose in Jack's mind—had they come as agents for Jasper Banker?

All these doubts, theories and questions thronged in the boy's head after he went to bed, and he could not compose himself to sleep. He continually thought of the men in the house, and the black horse in the stable. Was Jack safe?

True, he was carefully locked in, and as Joe had feared that Banker might take measures to poison him, his quarters were so arranged that no prowler could convey food to him secretly; but if Banker was in a sufficiently desperate mood, he might even fire the stable in order to be revenged on Perkins and Horse-King Joe.

In vain the youth tried to convince himself that these fears were groundless.

Finally he had an idea that took him out of bed in a twinkling.

He would not worry about the matter any longer, but would go to the stable and sleep near Black Jack the rest of the night.

This plan was no sooner formed than he proceeded to execute it. He dressed fully, left the house by a rear door, and started for the stable. The night was not very dark, but as no moon was shining, it could not be called light.

The stable was not visible from the house, being concealed by an intervening shed, and he could see nothing of it until he turned the corner of the latter. When he did so he experienced a feeling of relief at seeing the door of Black Jack's quarters as he had left it. With a lighter heart he went on, took out his key and prepared to enter.

Suddenly he stopped with his hand half-way forward.

He had seen something which was *not* as he had left it.

On the ground were splinters of wood, and as he looked for their source he saw that the door, around the fixed lock, was shattered and nearly torn to pieces.

A fear which almost overpowered him swept over his mind, and he jerked the door open. No bolt barred his way. Then he found his sudden, and worst, fear realized.

Black Jack was gone!

The young jockey did not need any explanation of the fact, and his mind flashed to Looker and Pratt with a depth of resentment hardly to be expected in his nature.

They were the thieves.

Hardly conscious what he was doing, Joe caught up a bridle and ran from the stable. Where were the thieves and their prize? How long had they been gone?

He had a good view of the road south of the house, and there, half a mile away, he could barely distinguish a dark, moving object, or group, which was plainly made up of men traveling with horses in some form.

More than that he could not tell, but as travelers were few and far between on that country road, he jumped to the conclusion that it was Black Jack and his captors.

The horse was not yet out of sight, but how was he to be followed and regained?

It was mechanically, rather than anything else, that Joe glanced toward the pasture. There, standing with his head over the fence, was Black Jack's brother, the young horse Joe had lately broken—Bronze Ben, they had named him.

The youth's mind was made up in a moment.

Ben was not so fleet as the black horse, but he was better than the average of Long Island horses.

Jaunty Joe hastened to bridle him, and then, without waiting for a saddle, or to notify Mr. Perkins, the boy leaped upon Ben's bare back and went shooting down the road.

He had been unable to gauge the speed of the runaway, but he put Ben to as good pace as he dared—the young horse must not be winded or ruined.

Down the road he swept as fast as he dared let the colt go.

His heart warmed to the noble young fellow as he saw how gallantly he tried, and his hand was passed caressingly over the slender neck.

"Good fellow!" he exclaimed; "you shall never want for a friend while I'm alive. Help me recover Jack, and you and I will never be parted while I can help it!"

By and by a slight hill had to be ascended, while beyond it was a long, level road. As they reached the top, Joe looked eagerly ahead. Were the runaways there?

The result surprised him. They *were* there, and that, too, much nearer than he had dared hope. Three horses were in the party, and even at that distance his keen eyes picked out Black Jack.

He was on the right track.

For the first time the boy remembered that there was something more to do than to overtake them in a race. Three men were visible, while he was not only a boy but was unarmed. How was he to regain the stolen animal when he did overtake them?

Just as he was considering this point the party paused, opened a gate and entered the field to the left. It was a place used for pasturing, was sparsely timbered in places, and was bordered on the opposite side by another road. He judged that it was their intention to cross and strike the other road, and he was pleased with the prospect.

They entered the field without seeing the pursuer, and he rode to the gate and followed after.

As they had now relapsed into a walk he might at any time have overtaken them, but he held back and tried to think of some way by which he could rescue Black Jack. In this way they went nearly a quarter of a mile. At this point the timber was thick enough to be called a wood, and all was so dark that when, riding past a large thicket, Jaunty Joe saw a fire blazing before him, he abruptly halted, greatly surprised.

Yes, a fire was burning there, and around it were collected several forms, men and women.

A recollection of the Gypsies at once flashed upon the pursuer, and he kept his place and looked at them sharply. His suspicion received confirmation.

It was a Gypsy camp, and Black Jack now had at least a dozen captors instead of one, for the new-comers were alighting.

CHAPTER XIV.

A STARTLING EXPERIENCE.

HORSE-KING JOE was considerably disturbed by this discovery. Not once abandoning his theory that the horse-thieves were Looker and Pratt, it now seemed that they were in league with the Gypsies, and the chances of rescuing Black Jack grew less.

Whether the band was that of King Ryer he did not know, but it made little difference. Because Melvina was his friend, it did not follow that the stern old chief would aid him.

The youth's first impulse was to hasten to the village and bring help, but, somehow, he had a presentiment that it would not do to lose sight of Black Jack, and, in any case, the Gypsies were likely to move on at once now the stolen horse was in their hands.

A moment longer he hesitated, and then dismounted, led Bronze Ben to a retired point and tied him to a sapling.

He then crept toward the group by the fire.

Black Jack was the observed of all the party. He had been led forward, and men and women alike crowded around to see him. He was not at ease. He tossed his head, champed his bit, and when a hand was laid too familiarly upon him, made passes at the offender with open mouth.

Jaunty Joe saw Looker and Pratt, and—yes, King Ryer was there, as tall, dark and stern as ever.

Melvina was not visible.

The boy had crept so near that he could overhear all that was said, and as Ryer and Looker stood together, they gave him enough to which to listen.

"He's a noble brute," said the Gypsy chief, sweeping his gaze over the horse.

"Good enough to run some risk for, eh?" replied Looker.

"Your share of the risk is small."

"So is yours."

"You talk nonsense now."

"Not so. I will change the brute's appearance so that nobody will know him."

"So you have said before, but I rely more on keeping him out of sight than upon your arts."

"Wait until you see what I can do. Now I'm going to bleach him from head to foot, and in the morning he will be, not black, but a rusty brown. He's just the sort of an animal for that dodge. Paint a horse, and the first rain, or a good solid sweat, will betray your work; but once bleach a black horse with my preparation and only time, and a good deal of that, can restore him to his old condition. Then I shall clip his mane judiciously."

Horse-King Joe's blood boiled.

The idea of his loved Black Jack being subjected to such treatment was enough to upset any decent person.

"You can go ahead, and I'll carry out my compact with you," said Ryer, moodily, "but I confess that I wish I had never agreed to it. It may get my people into trouble."

"Nonsense! You can dodge all pursuers. I am told that you are as cunning as a fox."

"I am a Gypsy," was the dignified reply. "But I am now getting old, and, somehow, I have not the taste for wild scenes that I once had. Indeed, I would never have consented to serve you in this matter had it not been that I wanted the money for a particular object."

He glanced toward the woman as he spoke, and Joe, at least, understood what he meant.

He was getting old, and he wished to provide for Melvina before he died. Probably he realized at last that the wandering life he had led was not a fit life for her.

Looker spoke encouragingly, and then began preparations for the transformation of Black Jack. He was given a pail half filled with water, and into this he poured some dark chemical which colored the whole a peculiar brown.

As Jaunty Joe saw these preparations progressing he grew more and more angry. It seemed rank sacrilege to spoil Black Jack's wonderful coat.

Looker suddenly lifted the pail and a brush and advanced. He dipped the brush and moved it toward the horse, but it never touched him.

Joe's rage overcame him at this crisis; he bounded from cover, snatched the brush from Looker's hand and flung it into the fire, and, almost at the same moment overturned the pail, spilling the mixture on the ground.

Another moment and he had thrown one arm over Black Jack's neck, and as he was greeted with a joyful whinny by the noble animal, he defiantly cried:

"This is *my* horse—I want you to let him alone!"

Dead silence followed the remark. Black Jack rubbed his nose fondly against the youth's shoulder, but the human members of the group seemed turned to statues. Looker was the first to recover his presence of mind.

"By the fiends!" he exclaimed, "it's the boy!"

"Yes, it's I," retorted Joe, "and I've come for my horse."

"Well, you can't have him. Curse you! I took him to keep, and it's a bad day for you when you meddle. Hang you! we are not to be enchered out of our game."

King Ryer pushed to the front, a troubled look on his face.

"What does this mean?" he asked. "Who are you, boy?"

"I work for the owner of this horse, and have charge of him, sir."

The boy was in for the game, and he confronted them all boldly, though he took care to address the chief respectfully.

"How came you here?"

"I followed this villain when he came, and I hope, sir, that you will not aid him in his infamous work."

"We are all one here," said the Looker, quickly, "and it is too late to back out."

"I say it is not. I can speak for the owner of this horse, and I say that if he is restored to me now, nobody but those who took him will be in any danger. That's you two thieves who came into the house, and played traitor to your host."

Then the spirited speaker turned upon Ryer and added:

"Give me the horse, sir, and I will never mention this matter to any one. You will be safe."

Ryer's face bore a troubled look, and the

thief evidently feared the day would go against him.

"By the fiends!" he cried, "the horse is mine and I will keep him. Interfere if you dare!"

He sprung forward to seize the bridle, but Black Jack had a wary eye out for danger, and he suddenly wheeled partially and sent out his heels viciously. If Mr. Looker had been six inches nearer he might never have known what hit him; as it was, those shooting heels just caught his loose coat and he turned a complete back somersault, coming down heavily.

Horse-King Joe saw that Black Jack's blood was up, and he determined to escape without delay.

With a light spring he landed on the horse's back, and Jack laid his ears back and, with flashing eyes and swelling nostrils, waited for the word to go. He would have gone as resistlessly as a thunderbolt, but Pratt, undismayed by his leader's fall, sprung forward and tore the boy jockey from his seat.

Another moment and Looker was up, swearing loudly.

"Hold the young demon!" he cried. "Don't let him escape. If he tries it, knife him!"

Pratt was trying to obey the first order, but Joe managed to give him a kick that laid him out on the grass, and then the boy sprung to King Ryer's side.

"I appeal to you to save me from these ruffians," he said, with remarkable coolness. "Do you know who they are? They are tools of a gambler named Jasper Banker!"

Joe only suspected this, but he knew the statement would find good soil on which to root when made to the chief.

Ryer started, while Looker excitedly exclaimed:

"It's a lie! Don't be fooled by the young hound, Ryer. I declare that I don't even know Banker. Never heard the name."

"I say you stole the horse for him."

"I did not."

"You did, and he used you as his agent because he knew King Ryer would not help him. He dared not bargain with Mr. Ryer, so you became his tool."

Again a fierce retort trembled on Looker's lips, but the Gypsy chief was at last aroused, and he grasped his ally's arm harshly.

"Is there truth in this?" he demanded.

"Not a grain. I—"

"You said you were the agent of another man."

"It was not Banker; I swear it."

"Hold on! I've got something to say here."

And then forth from the group of women came a slight figure which Joe recognized at first glance.

It was Melvina Ryer.

"I'm well acquainted with all these parties," she added, in a bluff way, "and I reckon I can throw light on them two chaps there. They need it!"

She pointed to Looker and Pratt.

"Melvina! what do you know about them?" Ryer asked, in surprise.

"Only what I've heard them say, but that's enough to show what colored cats they are. They never took my eye at all, and I've taken trouble to listen to what they said. I've heard them talk about the man they worked for, and they spoke of him as 'Jasper.'"

"It's a mistake—" began Looker, hurriedly, but the old chief turned upon him angrily.

"Have you dared come here as Jasper Banker's tool?" he cried, in a voice which made the villain shake.

"No, no! The girl means well, but she is mistaken. Why, this boy is Jasper Banker's best friend; works for him by the year; Jasper told me so himself."

Melvina broke into a laugh.

"Go right on and hang yourself!" she said.

"Now, you can't make that go down here. Banker and Jaunty Joe hate each other like p'izon; I knew it, because I once saw them have a fight."

"Do you know this boy, Melvina?" Ryer asked, in increased surprise.

"I should say I do. Joe, how do you do?"

And the girl walked up to Joe and shook his hand warmly, at the same time winking one of her great, black eyes mysteriously.

"We are old friends, Joe and I are; and I am ready to answer for him. He's true blue, and will never do the Gypsies harm."

"That's a fact, King Ryer," added the boy jockey. "I have known of you and your band a long time, and I have no wish to harm you. Now, this horse belongs to the man I work for, and I want him back. Give him to me, and I will promise that you shall not be molested.

Ain't I a better friend than these men who work for Banker?"

"We don't work for him," began Looker, but King Ryer stamped his foot angrily.

"Stop!" he commanded. "You have betrayed yourselves. First you declared you had 'never even heard the name,' and then, a moment ago, you quoted what Banker told you. This is enough, and I wash my hands of you. Go, and be thankful that I do not make you suffer for your treachery. Go, and never let me look on your faces again!"

The two villains knew better than to defy him, and as matters had resulted they were glad to get away.

Without taking the trouble to say good-by they sneaked out of the camp, and, once gone, retreated from the vicinity and the town as soon as possible.

In the mean while King Ryer had turned his eyes keenly, sternly upon Jaunty Joe, and was, it seemed, trying to read his very thoughts.

"Boy," he said, "there is more to this than I understand. How does it happen that you know Melvina?"

CHAPTER XV.

THE GAMBLER'S NEW SCHEME.

HORSE-KING JOE was not in the least troubled by this question, and in a straightforward manner, aided at intervals by Melvina, he told the story of their acquaintance, boldly admitted that he had seen the chief both at the boat-house and the Banker ruins.

When the story was told the chief remained standing in silence, looking thoughtfully at vacancy. Minutes passed, yet he did not stir, and then Melvina, who had been glancing from him to Joe, and then back again, went to his side and placed her hand on his arm.

"You are not angry, King Ryer?" she said, softly.

He started, like one who comes back from another, but imaginary world.

"Angry? No; there is nothing to be angry at. I am glad the boy is your friend because my enemies are his."

He then turned to Joe and questioned him in regard to himself. The young jockey answered frankly, having nothing to conceal, and the chief was soon in possession of the main facts of his life. Ryer watched him closely all the while they talked, but volunteered but few words of importance at the close.

They had an amicable talk, in which Joe repeated his declaration that no harm should come to the Gypsy band, and then Ryer told him he could take his horse and go unmolested whenever he wished.

If he had been alone he would not have been in any hurry to go, for the novelty and wildness of the scene had an attraction for him; but the horses ought to be stabled, so he shook hands with Ryer and Melvina, and left the camp.

Mounted on Black Jack, he rode to where Bronze Ben had been left, secured him, and then rode homeward.

He placed both in the stable and remained with them the rest of the night.

When Mr. Perkins heard of this fresh outrage in the morning, his usually placid soul was wonderfully stirred, and he thirsted for revenge. He declared that the only proper place for "Looker" was in State Prison, and that he would put him there.

Search was made for Mr. Looker, but he was not found. City detectives believed him to be a New York sharper, but said person had disappeared from his usual haunts, and proof was wanting.

At Joe's suggestion no attempt was made to connect Jasper Banker with the affair. It would be hard to do this, and the boy jockey felt sure that the turf gambler would yet give them a hold upon him, if allowed a loose rein.

His promise to the Gypsies was faithfully kept; they were not molested, and they soon left the town in their usual wandering way.

After the last adventure Joe slept in the stable every night, and also had the place made literally burglar-proof.

At the end of another week Joe looked about for a chance to give Black Jack his first experience on the turf, and the announcement of a race at the town where the old Banker homestead was situated caught him at once.

He wanted Jasper to see Black Jack win, and the gambler was likely to be there when he heard of the coming event, wherever he might be just then.

The black horse was showing to best advantage as a runner, and there was just the chance for him at this place. He was accordingly entered in a "flat" race for saddle-horses.

Joe had hopes that he would do a mile in 1:45, or even a second better, and though all the other horses entered were experienced on the turf, none was known to have a better record than 1:47.

Two more weeks were given him in which to prepare, and then he and Mr. Perkins took Black Jack and left the farm. It was an eventful day for the young horse, but he seemed to think that whatever his trainer wished was all right and followed him willingly.

On their way to the quarters selected in the town where the races were to occur they passed the old Banker house, and it vividly recalled the wild night scenes Joe had once witnessed there, but though he kept sharp watch for Jasper, he saw him nowhere and could not learn that he was in town.

For the time being matters were very lively there.

Some really fine horses were to compete, and the sporting fraternity had turned out in numbers. Every hotel was filled to overflowing and private families did a good business also.

Jaunty Joe, being no novice in such matters, had engaged all the accommodations they needed well in advance, and they had nothing to occupy their attention except the race in which Black Jack was to make his first appearance.

Near the further end of the village was a small white cottage owned by a widow. She usually had three spare rooms, but all were taken for the great occasion—one by a jockey who was to ride in the flat race; one by a quiet old gentleman, and a third by a gentleman who did not arrive until the evening before the great day.

His room had been engaged by the old gentleman, and when he did come, he was at once shown to the latter's room.

The two men met in a free-and-easy way.

"Hallo, Jas!"

"Hello, Abe! Are you here at last?"

"As you see."

"Well, I'm glad of it, for I want some other 'spotted' man in town to take the curse off of me."

Abe glanced apprehensively at a third person in the room; a small, red-faced man; but the old gentleman laughed and added:

"You needn't be afraid of him. He's a bird of our feather. Mr. Abe Allen, Sam Toombs, the noted horse-jockey."

There was the usual shaking of hands, and then the trio sat down. The reader has recognized Jasper Banker in the "old gentleman," and we need only say that Abe Allen was "Looker," to show what a gathering it was.

"Sam is going to ride the winning horse tomorrow," continued Banker.

"If you're sure of that, I wish I could do something as a bettor."

"Well, you can; that's just what I got you down a for."

"I don't like to risk it, with that infernal Jaunty Joe around."

"Nonsense! You're not usually timid."

"Somehow, I feel afraid of him."

"Afraid of a boy?"

"Call him what you will; I'm beset with the idea that he was born to bring me to trouble," said Allen, shaking his head gloomily.

"That's all moonshine," said Jasper, airily.

"Why, my dear fellow, I have more cause than you to fear him, yet here I am, bold as life, and prepared to make a fortune. I tell you, Abe, I've got a fine scheme under way, and not only will I bleed these country folks of their last dollar, but the rest of the sporting men will go back to Brooklyn and New York dead broke."

"You seem dead sure."

"I am. Didn't I write you so? Did you bring much money?"

"Two thousand dollars; but I warn you I'm not going to put it out unless I'm safe. It's all the money I have, and I am in such a hole that to lose it would break me."

"You can make it ten thousand."

"Show me how," said Allen, his eyes twinkling.

Banker produced a slip of paper.

"Here are the entries for the race we bet on. Running race, mile heat; first horse to win two heats, wins."

"What are the entries?"

"Maple Leaf, Zeke K., Jolly Boy, Valley Vic, Buckeye Maid and Black Jack."

"So Perkins's horse is in?"

"Of course. Were it not for that, I should not be here. My whole scheme is directed against Perkins and that cursed boy, and I'll bust 'em, sure."

"What's the scheme?"

"Well, Maple Leaf is going to be prime favorite, though he has never beaten 1:47. Zeke K., record half a second slower, will probably be second favorite, and Buckeye Maid may stand third. Valley Vic, Jolly Boy and Black Jack will be lumped as the 'field,' but do you know, I believe Black Jack can knock Maple Leaf and Zeke K., silly?"

"The two favorites? Then where do you come in?"

Banker placed his finger on the name "Buckeye Maid."

"Right there!"

"Ah! You evidently have a sharp trick on the books. What is it?" and Allen began to be more interested.

"I'll tell you. Fix your eagle-eye on Buckeye Maid. She purports to be a Western horse with a record of 1:47, but as it is doubtful, she don't seem likely to sell high. Really, she is no Western horse, but a New Hampshire flyer, good for 1:45 any day—that's her record—and liable to do forty-four to-morrow."

"Ha! I think I see. You've slid her in on 'em."

"Just so. She comes here in disguise, as it were. I've worked this game up with great care and some expense, and I'm bound to win. Of course, with her record of forty-five, she couldn't go in the forty-seven class, but nobody but me and my friends suspect that she is Lady Luce, the White Mountains flyer."

"I see your scheme, but can you win enough to make a good thing out of it?"

"Certainly."

"And beat Perkins's horse?"

Banker scowled blackly.

"Exactly. That, of course, is my main, as it was my first object."

"Hope you'll succeed better than before."

"Oh! she's sure to win; dead sure."

"But she may be recognized."

"Not likely."

"Well, about the money part," said Allen eagerly. "Of course the management is not in the trick?"

"Not a soul but me and my friends."

"Then you won't trouble the pools?"

"Oh! I shall 'risk' something there, and buy on the favorite, Maple Leaf. That will be for a blind. Really, I and two of my friends, and you, if you'll go in, will make every bet on Lady Luce, *alias* Buckeye Maid, that we can and be safe. I'm going to win twenty thousand or lose all I have."

"Egad! you can count me in!" Allen said quickly. "I, too, will go my last dollar."

"Sam Toombs, here, will drive Lady Luce. Of course he's in the scheme, and a right good man he is. He will let the first heat go to whoever wants it, and then take two straight. And Lady Luce can do it, easily."

"Ha! won't it be a come-down for Perkins and that diabolical Horse-King Joe?"

"They will lose whatever they put up, pop sure. And now, gents, let us drink to our success. To-morrow will be the biggest day I've seen for some time, and it will be a jolly experience to lick Black Jack higher than a kite, and also pocket twenty thousand. Fill up! Here's to us and our crowd, and destruction to Jaunty Joe!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GREAT RACE.

It was a night of excitement such as the town had never before seen. They were just making their reputation as a racing people, and on this occasion more sporting men had noticed them than before.

During the evening the stores were well crowded, and no particular notice was attracted when a tall, dark-faced man entered one place and purchased a few of the necessities of life.

This man, however, was King Ryer!

The Gypsy king seemed to have a habit of appearing whenever there was anything of importance about to occur, and though it was not likely he had come to bet on the races—he was not supposed to have anything to bet—there were men in the town who would have been glad to know that he was near.

He showed himself only a short time, however. When his purchases were made, he quietly disappeared.

Another day dawned; one of a kind that pleased every man who had a horse that was to race. A better day could not have been wished for or had.

Mr. Perkins was somewhat nervous. He wanted to see Black Jack cover himself with glory, and the difficulties seemed far greater, now that the foe was visible, than they had done

when on the farm. He acknowledged himself unfit for anything, and left all to the ever ready Joe.

The latter had never been cooler, and he viewed all the excitement with the air of a veteran. He had been in too many races to be nervous now, his nature being directly the opposite. He kept jealous watch of Black Jack, to see that no one tampered with him. The horse was in fine condition, but a drug secretly conveyed to him would lose him all chance in the race.

Despite this he had some time to notice what was going on around him, and, skillfully as Jasper Banker thought himself disguised, Jaunty Joe recognized him.

A smile swept over the boy's face.

He had felt sure that the turf-gambler would be on hand, and he was glad it was so. He expected to anger him anew by sending Black Jack under the wire ahead of all others.

Betting went much as Banker had predicted. Maple Leaf was the favorite, in the pool, selling at one hundred, while Zeke K. brought forty, Buckeye Maid a smaller sum, and the other three were forced into the "field."

This pleased Joe; those who took Black Jack would either lose but little, or win a good deal.

Banker and his gang worked the crowd to the extent of their pocket-books, making private bets, but doing it so cautiously that no outsider "tumbled" to their trick. By the time the horses were called, half their money was up on Buckeye Maid.

When she had run and lost the first heat, they were ready to bet their last cent, hoping to get great odds.

And they were sure the Maid would win gallantly.

When the horses were called, Jaunty Joe was as calm as ever, but he realized that all was with him a matter of chance. Black Jack might run well and be beaten, or the novelty of racing with other horses might upset him entirely, and cause him to make an inglorious failure at the start.

Black Jack was a Sphinx for the time being, and he could not speak if he would.

The decisive moment came at last, and Joe prayed that a good start might be obtained. Repeated scoring was one of the things they had to fear, as working against the untried horse.

Luck was on their side for once, at least, and to his great joy the first attempt was successful. Away went the horses in a bunch.

The Young Horse King sat in his saddle coolly, but never before had he felt such intense interest. How would Black Jack behave in a hard fight for the lead?

The black horse's natural manner was one of close application to business, and utter disregard for everything else; but he now saw at once that he was on a path by him untrodden. He showed signs of nervousness, as well as of anger, and his flashing eyes and flattened ears told that he was ill at ease, though very much in earnest.

Joe set himself at work to calm this disturbance, and his voice sounded in Black Jack's ears, calmly, soothingly, barely audible.

It had the usual effect, and all Jack's nervousness disappeared, though he was still on the alert, with an appearance worthy of a war-horse.

Evidently, he did not recognize the right of the other animals to race along beside him.

For the first time Joe glanced critically around. How was the race going? Maple Leaf and Zeke K. had the lead; Buckeye Maid was neck-and-neck with Black Jack; and Valley Vic and Jolly Boy formed the rear guard.

Such was the position at the end of a half-mile, during which the two horses strove desperately for the advantage. After that Buckeye Maid lost ground, while Black Jack steadily gained on the leaders. It was soon plain that the fight was between the three. The riders of Maple Leaf and Zeke K. were surprised to see the black horse appear as a close competitor, but as they entered on the last quarter, nose to nose, Horse-King Joe was only a neck behind.

Then followed a struggle not soon to be forgotten—a period of suspense—and then Black Jack shot under the wire a winner, in 1:46.

He had run the heat as steadily as a veteran, and without the usual signs of effort. Farmer Perkins's honest face beamed like the rising sun, and great was the excitement among the sporting fraternity. Black Jack had only to win one more heat to take the race, and those who had bet against the "field" now resorted to the usual means to make themselves right.

Novice Black Jack might be, but he was now a prime favorite.

Still Banker, Allen and their gang went quietly around and laid out every dollar they

had on Buckeye Maid. She had taken no better than fourth place, but, according to their scheme, she was to win the next two heats straight.

Black Jack had done his level best at forty-six, they argued, and Buckeye Maid was good for forty-four.

Once more the horses got away in good style, and then all but Valley Vic and Jolly Boy shot away at tremendous pace. Buckeye Maid was no longer held in, and as she was really a gallant mare, she swept away like a whirlwind, Sam Toombs riding with a confident smile on his face.

At the end of the first quarter the Maid and Black Jack were neck-and-neck, with Zeke K. and Maple half a length behind.

After that both the latter lost steadily and were practically out of the race.

Every eye was fixed on the great struggle between the leaders, and the crowd were wild with excitement. Around the course thundered the two gallant horses, and nobody could tell who would win.

Buckeye Maid was a veteran at the work, and game to the back-bone, and she was a splendid sight as she swept along. But she did not shake off Black Jack so easily. He gave her speed for speed, and at the half they were still so near even that no one could say which led.

Sam Toombs looked around at his rival in surprise. He knew they were doing better than 1:46, and the black horse's pace surprised him.

On, on they swept, and sporting men grew wild with delight as they neared the end of the third quarter. Men who had seen many races said that day that they had never seen a grander sight than Black Jack.

With wonderful steadiness he dashed on, and only that he held right to business, he might have seemed a wild horse again. Fierce enough for a war-horse he looked, and his flashing eyes were a sight to see and be remembered forever.

But, oh! the play of his slender legs. It was wonderful, and those who had bet on him were wild with delight. Steady, strong and resistless as a locomotive he swept ahead, and Sam Toombs grew almost frantic as he saw himself losing ground.

He was getting all possible speed out of Buckeye Maid, but, as they entered the last quarter, Black Jack was a head to the good.

The jockey uttered a loud oath, while the Young Horse King turned and looked at him with calmness which was maddening. The dishonest rider, like his employer, had risked his all on the Maid, and the race was going against him!

The black horse increased his lead. He was showing himself possessed of wonderful endurance, while the pace was knocking the mare to pieces. The lead became half a length, and Jack seemed as fresh as ever.

Sam Toombs saw that the race was lost. He felt the Maid tremble beneath him, and knew that she could never show at the front again. The cunning trick was going to fail, after all, and he and his allies would be left beggars.

It was a just reward of their treachery, but the thought maddened him. Then it was that he lost his head entirely, and resolved that if he could not win, he would have revenge. An idea had flashed upon him, and though it was one of which he might bitterly repent in future, he was now in a mood to weigh consequences then.

He had a knife in his pocket, and he drew and opened this quickly. He had only a moment in which to accomplish his purpose, for Buckeye Maid was fast going to pieces, and they were nearing the wire.

With a fiendish expression on his face, the villain bent forward and deliberately cut the girth of Jaunty Joe's saddle!

His purpose was clear; he hoped to see the saddle turn and dash the boy to the ground, perhaps to death.

It was a neat scheme in its way—if he was willing to take the consequences—but he had to deal with one as sharp as himself. Jaunty Joe had not failed to keep an eye on him, and as he felt the girth relax, he flung himself slightly forward; the saddle turned and fell harmlessly to the ground; while the boy jockey, settling back in his place, gradually reined in Black Jack as the noble animal shot under the wire!

He had beaten Buckeye Maid by a full length, and won the heat in—

It was not until some time after that Joe received the official time, but, when announced, it proved to be 1:43—by far the best time ever made on the track.

Few people thought of the time then, for Sam

Toombs's dastardly trick had set everybody wild. Every honest man, whether winner or loser, was indignant, and there was a general rush for the villainous jockey.

He seemed in danger of being torn to pieces at once, but Joe Baldwin raised his voice so loud that everybody paused.

"Don't touch the coward!" cried the youth; "he'll never ride in a race again, and he ain't worth touching; but I want you to know just what he's tried to do to-day. He has run the race with a horse which never should have been in the 1:47 class. Her real name is Lady Luce; she's a New Hampshire runner, and had a record of 1:45. I recognized her as we came to the scratch the first time, by a scar on one of her legs, but I thought I'd try her a hack, anyhow. I've done it, and Black Jack has won two straight heats and the race!"

He could not speak further, for the enthusiasm of the crowd broke all bounds, and the airseemed fairly to shake with the deafening cheers for Black Jack and his rider.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LAST SURPRISE.

THERE were men in the crowd who did not cheer, and the most prominent among these were Jasper Banker and his tools. A more dumfounded, dismayed gang it would have been hard to find. They had risked every dollar they could raise, believing that the horse they had used in their trick was as sure of winning as she was of starting, and the result left them penniless.

Angry, crushed, amazed, they stole away like hunted wolves.

Not only were they beggars, but if Sam Toombs confessed, the people might fall upon them in their anger. The schemers did not feel safe there.

As for Toombs, he was arrested as soon as possible, and hurried to the lock-up to save his neck from personal harm.

Around Black Jack was gathered a happy and admiring group—those who had won on him. Farmer Perkins was radiant. His face was more than ever like the rising sun, and he could only reply incoherently to the congratulations received.

Horse-King Joe came in for his share of praise. It was known that he had taken a wild horse from pasture and made him what he now was, and he was voted a fit mate for the noble black.

And so ended the great event. Other races followed, but none that equaled this in interest. Black Jack, the hero of the day, had literally "captured the town."

Perkins and Jaunty Joe were now ready to return to the farm, but the arrangement of trains made it necessary for them to wait over one night.

Black Jack was stabled at the place where Joe had stopped on his previous visit to the town, and they passed the time as pleasantly as the highly favorable circumstances admitted. Mr. Perkins had his pockets full of money, and was correspondingly happy.

Late in the evening Joe decided to take a walk, and though he had once felt sure that he never wanted to see the Banker homestead again, his feet somehow took him across the field to that place.

He entered the grove where he had been bound to a tree, rescued by Melvina, and nearly horsewhipped by Jasper. He found the very tree, and stood for some time thinking of those stirring scenes—and of Melvina.

Where was she now?

It seemed hard to locate the wandering people, and he finally aroused and walked on. He would take one look at the old wing, in which the treasure-seekers had worked, and then retrace his steps.

Thinking thus, he advanced several yards, and then came to a halt. He was not alone in the grove!

He had first heard voices, and then, looking, he saw a light, and by the light were at least two men. Who were they, and what was being done? One stood erect, holding a lantern, while the other seemed to be vigorously digging at the ground with a spade.

Instantly there flashed upon Joe's mind a recollection of the treasure reputed to be buried, and the efforts to find it he had once witnessed. Could it be other men were digging for it? But wait! King Ryer had declared that the chart used by the previous treasure-seekers was wholly incorrect.

Jaunty Joe began to be excited, and he moved cautiously toward the present diggers.

The darkness rendered approach easy, and

neither saw or heard him. But, on his own part, he had a surprise. The man with the lantern was King Ryer.

Eagerly he peered at the wielder of the spade, and again he was surprised.

It was John Kane, the burglar!

Kane had been some time at work and had already made quite an excavation, and he suddenly looked up as his spade sent forth a ringing sound.

"I guess we've found it," he quickly said.

"It may be a stone," calmly, coldly replied the Gypsy king. "Work on!"

Kane obeyed and threw out more earth, and then he suddenly spoke again.

"Great Scott! this is no stone. It's a tin box, as sure as you live! Ryer, we've found it!"

"Work on!" repeated the chief, still unmoved.

A few minutes passed, during which no sound was heard except those made by the digger, and then Kane dropped his spade, stooped, tugged at something, then arose and cast upon the ground a small square box.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" he cried, with ill-subdued excitement. "We have found it! The treasure is won at last!"

He leaped from the pit, but King Ryer calmly said:

"I believe you are right, and if it proves so, I will promptly pay you the fifty dollars I promised."

So saying, he wrenched open the tin box.

It was full to the top—full of yellow gold coins, which glowed and glittered in the light as they could only glitter under the force of strong imagination and excitement.

John Kane's eyes gleamed with cupidity. What a fortune; what a vast fortune! And he could have only fifty dollars—a wretched pittance. But was he obliged to put up with it? Was not the game—and the fortune—in his own hands? He was alone in the grove with the old man. What was to hinder him from possessing all the gold?

He glanced at the hole in the ground. It seemed admirably calculated for a grave.

Wildly gleamed the burglar's eyes, and with the spirit of murder in his heart he suddenly sprang forward, his hands outstretched to grasp the Gypsy's throat.

What happened next was a surprise to him.

Something like a panther shot from the darkness and seized his arm in a tenacious grasp. This was Jaunty Joe. Almost at the same moment a cry came from the other side and a light female figure darted into view. It was Melvina Ryer!

And, as though to cap the climax, the amazed ruffian found a revolver pressed against his breast by the Gypsy chief's unwavering hand.

"Fool!" said the old man, in a hard voice, "do you suppose I trusted you? I would as soon take a poisonous snake to my bosom. I expected this."

Then he turned to Horse-King Joe quietly.

"I did not expect you, young man, but you are welcome. There is work for you to do. Will you bind this scoundrel while I keep him covered with the revolver?"

"Willingly," Joe answered.

Kane, thoroughly frightened, protested, but he was tied securely with cords furnished by Ryer. He was taken to a tree some yards away, and then the chief led the way back to the pit where Melvina was guarding the gold.

Ryer pointed to the box and said:

"Young man, I want you to hear what I have to say. I thought once that this gold should never be dug up, but I changed my mind. I am a sick man, and near the grave. When I go I want to leave Melvina, my granddaughter, well provided for."

He looked kindly, even tenderly, at her, and then added:

"This gold is justly hers. It was buried by Mortimer Banker, and he was her father!"

The young people were speechless with surprise, and as they said nothing, King Ryer continued:

"Yes, he came to our camp fifteen years ago. He was a middle-aged widower, but, though dissipated, looked young and handsome. Maybe he retained these gifts through a bargain with the Evil One; I don't know."

"This is no time for a long story. I had a daughter, Melvina—the mother of this child. Mortimer Banker won her heart, and they were secretly married by one of the clergymen of his faith. Villain though he afterward proved, Banker did right once."

"But what was the result? In a few months he deserted his Gypsy wife. Then she faded away and died, leaving me only this child to re-

mind me of her. It was her daughter and—Mortimer Banker's."

"How I hated him I cannot tell, nor will I try. He died in an insane asylum, and in my old age and weakness, I am inclined to think he may not have been just right when with us. I am growing merciful."

"I have long known of his buried money—buried while he really was deranged—but I disdained to touch it until I saw death advancing upon me. Then I thought of Melvina—her daughter—and felt that it would not be right to leave her poor and a homeless wanderer. I was too weak to dig; I would not trust my own people; so I hired Kane to help me. You have seen the result."

"Young man," and here the chief turned suddenly to the Young Horse-King, "do you suppose Mr. Perkins will be a guardian to Melvina when I am dead?"

"I am sure he will, Mr. Ryer."

Joe spoke confidently, but it was chiefly because he hoped that it would be so.

"I want her to leave the band forever; it is a miserable life for her to lead. I want her to move in that society for which she may be fitted and this gold will do all that is necessary. I feel that it should all be hers. She is Jasper Banker's half-sister, but he has received and squandered his share."

"But," cried Melvina, "I'm not going to leave you, King Ryer."

"Not while I live, I hope," the chief replied, "but that will be but a short time. There, there, child, do not grieve. Death is the companion of all men, and often a good friend. And now let us take care of the gold and of the prisoner."

The following day all was excitement in the town. One man had killed another and then fled, pursued by officers. It was stated that the dead man had prevailed upon his slayer to bet all his money on a horse which had lost in the flat race.

Both had been left beggars. The latter had bitterly reproached the former for inducing him to bet; they had quarreled; and the shooting followed.

The name of the assassin was Abe Allen; that of the murdered man was Jasper Banker.

Two years have passed since the scenes of our story, and great changes have taken place. Let us briefly mention them.

Allen, seeking to escape his pursuers, leaped from a moving train and was killed. Kane, the burglar, was found to be very much "wanted," and he got ten years in prison. Sam Toombs, the "crooked" jockey, received a light sentence. He can never drive again. Pratt, the ally of "Looker," otherwise Allen, is in Sing Sing for a crime not connected with this story.

Jasper Banker, as we have seen, did not live to claim a share of the once-buried gold. He was interred in the village cemetery.

King Ryer's presentiment proved well founded. He soon passed to the silent land, but before he died he had seen the gold settled on Melvina, with Perkins as her guardian, and had received a promise that she should have everything done to make her a woman fit for any society.

She is now a charming girl, and though her complexion will always be somewhat dark, it is one of which she cannot justly complain. She is a beautiful and brilliant girl, and few would recognize in her the once wild Gypsy girl—Melvina Ryer.

She and Joe Baldwin are very good friends, and Mr. Perkins has prophesied that before the year of our Lord, 1889, Melvina will be Mrs. Baldwin.

To-day there are two fine young horses who are known all over the country as remarkable roadsters. What their present names are need not be stated; they were once known as Black Jack and Bronze Ben. They are owned by Perkins and Baldwin, which firm could not be induced to sell their wonders.

Bronze Ben has made a big name, and is a fine horse in every way, but is several seconds behind his brother as regards records.

Joe Baldwin believes there was never another horse like Black Jack. He has ridden him in many a winning race, and a more docile, intelligent, loving, but at the same time spirited, horse, it would be hard to find.

His young master will never part with him. By and by he will be withdrawn from the turf, and as Joe is now rich, he proposes to have his two great speeders for carriage horses.

Honest Mr. Perkins says they will be just the pair for Mrs. Melvina Baldwin to ride after on her wedding day.

THE END.

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BEADLE AND ADAMS, Publishers,
98 William Street New York.